The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR RICHARD W. CARLSON

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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[Note: This transcript was not edited by Mr. Carlson.]

Q: Today is March 2, 1993. This is an interview with Ambassador Richard W. Carlson on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Mr. Ambassador, could you give me a bit about your background?

CARLSON: Yes. Well, I was Ambassador to the Seychelles one year and before that I was Director of the Voice of America. I was at the Voice of America from the beginning of 1986 until the summer of 1991 and had responsibility for both the VOA Radio Marti, the inception legislatively mandated of TV Marti and all of USIA television in the last couple years that I was at the Voice.

Before the Voice of America I was the spokesman for the US Information Agency for about three months. I was a political appointee in both that job and in the subsequent jobs that I have mentioned...both at the Voice and as Ambassador to the Seychelles. I came to Washington in the fall of 1985 at the request of the Reagan Administration to be head of the Public Liaison Office for USIA, which was the spokesman's job.

I had come from La Jolla, California. I had lived in California since 1962 and had been a journalist and in the banking business. I had also, previous to coming to Washington, run for Mayor of San Diego. I was a candidate in the primary and the incumbent mayor, against who I ran, and I were the two top vote getters, and we ran in the general election. I was a candidate for about a total of ten months and went down to defeat in the fall of 1984. I then had a couple of business interests in San Diego and did that for a while. Then I took the position with the Reagan Administration. The spokesman's job was a Senate confirmation job.

Previous to that, I had been in the banking business in San Diego, as a banker, from 1976 until 1984 when I resigned and unsuccessfully ran for mayor. I had gone into the banking business directly from journalism. I did so for many reasons, but the primary motive was that in 1976 I was 35 years old and had been a reporter and writer and documentary maker, but mostly reporter, for about 14 years and decided that I should really change careers. I was fearful of ending up in the back room of a local television station writing editorials when I was fifty and I didn't want to do that. So I kind of cast around and a friend of mine was involved in a savings and loan called San Diego Federal which had been around since 1885. I joined him knowing nothing whatsoever about the banking business. At that time the savings and loan industry was heavily regulated and really fairly simple in its operations. This was before all of the disastrous legislative changes that took place and basically were responsible for the collapse of savings and loans.

He and I took a fairly solid, small savings and loan and ultimately converted it into a larger and still solid Federal savings bank called Great American First. We then took it from a mutually owned company, that is there was no ownership other than the depositors, and made it a stock company. It met with considerable success. When I left in 1984, we had taken the assets from about $220 million to about $8 billion. It had increased to about 150 officers in California. I was senior vice president for finance at that point, and it was a fairly well-known company.

I retired at the right moment, however. That was 1984. Of course the rest was history. It ultimately, too, merged with a regular commercial bank and there was no scandal attached to it.

But going back, I had come to California at the age of 21 in 1962. I went to Los Angeles to be a writer. I wanted to be a reporter. I got a job at the Los Angeles Times as a copy boy. I was there for about three months and was able to get a job as a reporter at UPI, full time at the age of 21 and a half. I was sent up to San Francisco and subsequently Sacramento, where I wrote a column on California agriculture called "The California Rancher" for UPI and then spent roughly 14 years doing various journeyman roles in journalism.

I made a documentary film called "Hoboes" in 1965 with a reporter from the Los Angeles Times named Lance Brisson. We traveled around the United States on trains and stayed in hobo jungles and missions, etc. We made this film and sold it to ABC, the ABC O&O stations, there were five in those days, and ABC offered us full time jobs in television, which was quite thrilling at the time since I went from no income at all for many years to a fairly decent income, suddenly.So in 1965 I went to work for ABC and subsequently worked for them as a reporter, correspondent, the West Coast political editor. In the early "70s I started the investigative unit for ABC television in Los Angeles and did that for about three years. The unit consisted of a correspondent, myself as producer, a camera crew, a film editor and a secretary and we worked on long term projects. Most of them involved malfeasance or corruption of one kind or another.

I was also a stringer for Time magazine and free-lanced articles for Look, which went out of business in 1972, and various magazines, particularly city magazines.

I was born in Boston in 1941 and grew up in a middle class household in a town called Norwood, about 14 miles south of Boston. My father died when I was eleven years old. We had just moved to Rhode Island shortly before and lived in East Providence, Rhode Island. I attended public schools there.

I had actually come from an orphanage in Boston called "The Home For Little Wanderers," and was adopted by my parents, the Carlsons...my name was Richard Boynton, actually. I was not adopted by my parents until I was 26 months old. So I obviously had another life previous to that, but I was unaware of that...and to this day somewhat unaware of it.

My father died and I was sort of a juvenile delinquent, the truth be told. The thing that really saved me from hopeless descent into delinquency in my adult years, I think, was public libraries. Among other things, I was very interested in reading and went to the public library in both Norwood, Massachusetts and then in Rhode Island.

Q: One of the blessings of Andrew Carnegie.

CARLSON: Yes. I really believe that. These are ultimately very democratic institutions, although they are only available to people who read. But their presence in a community makes a difference. It certainly made a difference in my life. It really was what kept me from stepping too far over the line. I never took drugs and never hurt anyone, but I was a very wild child for the times. I got kicked out of high school twice and then joined the Service at the age of 17.

I went into the Navy and went through boot camp. I then went through medical corpsman training. I then asked to be assigned to the Marine Corps and I was. I went to 3rd Battalion, Six Marines in Camp LeJeune where I went through field medical school. I was the company medic for an infantry company. At the same time I was selected for NROTC, enlisted man's program. I was sent to the University of Mississippi in civilian clothes. In fact I was released to inactive duty as a midshipman, but I was still on active duty. I had an enlistment which wasn't up until I was 21 years old. I spent the last year of my enlistment at the University of Mississippi as a student, even though I had not graduated from high school.

So I went to Old Miss, my enlistment expired in 1962 and I resigned from the program and decided to go back to Old Miss on my own. I went back in the fall of 1962 and the James Meredith riots took place.

Q: This refers to the integration of Old Miss.

CARLSON: Yes. James Meredith had applied for admission. He was an Air Force veteran and was in his late '20s. He had been turned down by Mississippi, there had never been a black student at Old Miss. The Federal Government intervened in the admissions process and with US marshals escorted James Meredith onto the University of Mississippi campus. There was heavy rioting, a couple of people were killed. The Airborne troops were brought in and it was a scene of considerable turmoil and great international interest for quite a time.

I had come back on my own steam and then withdrew during the riots and asked them to send me my check. I had paid out of state admission at that point. I then drove with another Yankee out to California. I had decided in effect that I would be a reporter...that was where my interests lay and that I had writing ability.

So I contacted a woman named Cassie Mackin, who had been a friend of mine that summer...she later became a fairly well known Hearst columnist and later correspondent finally for ABC television...she was White House correspondent. She has died of cancer some years ago. I had met her the previous summer when I was a cop in Ocean City, Maryland for the summer and she a reporter for the Baltimore Hearst paper...I think it was called the Journal American. She had convinced me that my future lay in writing. So I went out to the Los Angeles Times to get a job and that brings me up to the present.

Q: You were in the Voice of America from 1986-91. How did that come about?

CARLSON: I had been defeated as a candidate for San Diego mayor and was living in La Jolla. I had met with some success, some financial success, but I was living in God's waiting room and I wasn't old enough to do that. So I was very friendly with Pete Wilson, who is now the Governor of California. Pete and his wife were friends of ours, and he had been mayor and had run successfully for the US Senate. He realized that I was frustrated by my life. I just wasn't doing anything that was interesting and provocative and I was in the position that I felt I didn't want to go back to being a reporter...I had done that. So he suggested that because I had sort of peripheral Republican connections and because I had run for mayor...although I had run in a non-partisan race-all mayoral races in California are non-partisan, actually...that I should consider going back to Washington. My children were away in prep school, and my wife and I were free to do that if we wanted to.

He recommended me to the White House. It was uncertain as to what it was I would do. I was somewhat limited in my experience. I thought I had good experience, but only in some areas.

I flew back and saw Bob Tuttle who was Personnel Director in the White House. Tuttle thought that I was qualified for a public liaison, public spokesman position, so he recommended me as the head of external affairs for AID. The job was open and it was a Senate confirmation job for some reason. I stayed in Washington for about a week and tracked down the person who had had the job previously. I discovered that there were a lot of problems attendant to this position and they were not problems that I was interested in. They had mostly to do with fighting between left and right over birth control and instruction in Africa.

Q: Birth control and non-birth control were a major issue for AID. Do we give or not give condoms to the third world, etc.

CARLSON: Exactly. This was 1985. The person who had the job, in effect, had gotten at cross purposes with Senator Helms.

Q: Let us say he comes from the fairly far left of the political spectrum, a Republican from North Carolina.

CARLSON: I just didn't want to be involved in that. I just though I couldn't imagine anything less interesting to me to fight over. So I said no.

The day that I was going back California, Charles Wick, the Director of USIA, who I did not know, though I had met him, fired his something like ninth public liaison director. So they asked if I would be interested in this? I had read very unflattering newspaper accounts at that time of Charles Wick's tenure at USIA, beginning back probably the year before. He started in about 1981 and then he had run into some memos that had been printed which reflected in a poor way upon him. So I wasn't sure I wanted to do that.

But the Agency did deal with things that I could understand. It had to do with public affairs, it had to do with things I had experience with. So I went over and met Marvin Stone. Marvin Stone is a former editor-in-chief of US News & World Report and also chairman of the Board, and a fine guy. Marvin and I became very good friends. Marvin was then the Deputy Director of USIA. He had retired from US News & World Report and had been brought in really as a counterbalance to fill up the areas where Charles Wick was weakest in. There were a number of them, without being unkind to him. He is an interesting character.

Q: Very interesting. An activist but a very close friend of Ronald Reagan's, which always means power.

CARLSON: Of course. Marvin Stone was a good choice. He was serious minded, he had a lot of friends in Washington. It is great to be friends of the President, but it certainly is helpful to be friends with a lot of other people as well. And Marvin was excellent.

So I liked Marvin immediately. Marvin was interested in me for this job, but I wasn't sure that I wanted it...candidly because of the problems with Mr. Wick. He had already fired eight or nine people and why would I want to get fired. On the other hand, of course, one says obviously that you are not following Mr. Chips here. I wasn't afraid of the job, I knew I could do it.

So I said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. Let me stay for a week and I will come to work every day. Just let me use the current office that I might have and let me meet people. I'll take them to lunch." A friend of mine got me a room at the Metropolitan Club and I spent from Monday to Friday at USIA. The idea was that on Friday I would tell them whether I wanted the job. If I did want it they could offer it to me if they still wanted me.

So I spent the week there. I went out with the General Counsel and had lunch with him. And I talked with just about every person I could. I met a great cross section of political appointees and primarily Foreign Service Officers and career civil servants. I was impressed. I thought, and think, that as an outsider in Washington that there are lots of very high quality people in the US Government. People who are interesting to be around, who work very hard, who are very serious minded, and who had, within that Agency, and I am sure in many others, a sense of purpose. I liked the atmosphere of it. So I told Marvin Stone that though I realized that my chances for long tenure were not very good, based on everybody else's experiences, I would do this. So he gave me the job.

I had not met Wick at that point. Actually I had met him once in California at Ozzie and Harriet Nelson's house, who I knew very well, but he didn't know me. So I went and met Wick. I passed the mustard, whatever that was, with him and took the job.

Q: Did he say, "I have fired nine people and now I want this and this and this, and if you don't....?" What was your impression?

CARLSON: No, actually, he didn't. I think he is an interesting guy. He seemed to make these judgments by the seat of his pants. I base that on the fact that he didn't really ask me too many questions. We had a conversation. I deduced from this that he was sort of sizing me up...based on what I don't know. Possibly how you speak, what you look like, etc. It was really pretty much as simple as that. If he had any instructions to me they were put in the most general way and I don't remember them.

He had had, of course, a great deal of difficulty with the press. He had been caught by William Safire, the New York Times, taping conversations without people's knowledge. This happened sometime before I got there. He had been publicly humiliated. He had apparently considered leaving. There was a lot of pressure on him to quite. This had somewhat abated by the time I got there, but not much. He really had had a bad time.

I liked the products. I could understand them and was interested in them. The Voice of America was the largest single element of USIA and then there were the posts abroad, the libraries, etc. So I leaped in immediately. I flew home, discussed it with my wife and we decided to take it. She and I flew back here and on the weekend we bought a house. We did that immediately. My wife's uncle is Senator Fulbright...my wife's mother's brother. So we had a connection with him and, in fact, we almost bought his house. We went to him...he has never been in love with USIA particularly, but it is where the Fulbright program resides.

Q: He is often very suspicious of USIA. Much of our government policy is predicated around the fact that he has been dubious about some things.

CARLSON: Well, he said things to me. He came and testified on my behalf when I went up for hearings for the ambassadorial post and he always said things like, "Well, you are a nice boy and I know you are not as bad as those people at USIA."

So we came back and settled in and I really spent no time socializing. I worked 14 hours a day. I kept thinking I was making a gross error, particularly as a political appointee, by not making some social life for myself so that I could spread my tentacles around a bit, but I was too busy. I was just quite keen to absorb all that was around me, partly out of self protectiveness, so I wouldn't trip and fall on my face at public gatherings. I regularly had to stand up and do press briefings. The demands weren't anywhere like they are in the State Department, but Mr. Wick would regularly get hostile questions from the media and I was responsible for handling them and I wasn't interested in compromising myself, particularly. I had been around long enough not to sacrifice myself on somebody else's altar. It was not an easy job necessarily. Mr. Wick is not an easy person.

Q: When you first arrived there...it is always important to get a feel of the principals...what were you getting? Were you finding yourself between not just the professionals but basically the professionals who were running the Agency and Mr. Wick who wanted to go in different direction?

CARLSON: I found myself in between some times. Of course, the point at which I had arrived, Mr. Wick had been there for four years, perhaps a little bit more, and the combinations I think had been reached in significant ways with the senior officers. It is, I think, true that Wick had faith in many of them. They were not at odds with each other all the time. The Counselor of the Agency, who was a senior Foreign Service Officer...there were a couple of them there, John Cordeck was one...these people worked very, very hard. Charles Wick was difficult. He was intelligent in his way. He is very aggressive and has a lot of ideas and is in constant command and constant motion. He is not an introspective person that I am aware of. But on the plus side he gets a lot of things done. But he is very volatile and difficult.

He kind of chewed up some of these people. I think the John Cordecks of the world had dealt with people like this before. They were Foreign Service Officers. Not all of the ambassadors are easy. Wick at least recognized the intelligence and experiential aspects of John Cordeck and would defer to them often if they were direct with him. I was direct with him. I could see I would not survive if I was a toady here, so this was the way I behaved with Mr. Wick.

I think the people who were successful with him behaved this way. They were respectful, they were polite...which I was by nature...but they didn't put up with a lot of extraneous bullshit from him. And I didn't. Neither did John Cordeck. I just made sure I was polite about it. I would say, "I don't think you are right." And he wouldn't give up. He would say, "What do you mean I am not right? I am right." And I would say, "Well, I am afraid, with all due respect, that you are not right." Then, if he insisted, you just had to do it. But he respected that, I believe. Like most people with big egos he wanted a certain amount of yes-man routine, but he would abide those who wouldn't do it if they had something to offer or if he felt they were smart and contributive.

I am just guessing that my relationship with him being a microcosm of others, but I think it was. He was not easy, but you had Marvin Stone, who was like a rock, had very good judgment, and who was very well connected in the foreign policy area for an outsider. He had been a foreign correspondent for many years and seemed to know an awful lot of folks. Charlie Wick had the intelligence to rely on Marvin for things. You could often back him off a bad position or if you felt, I did this too, if he told me to do something that I thought was really stupid, I didn't do it. If I couldn't talk him out of it I just didn't do it. And I think that is good staff work.

Q: Yes, this is what you are supposed to do.

CARLSON: Of course, and then later, I am sure if I had done it, he would have said, "Why did you ever do that? Just because I told you to?" So, I wouldn't. He wouldn't bring it up again, or realize later that it was a poor idea. It was quite a place of considerable ferment and terribly interesting to me. I thought it was fantastic. I loved it all.

Q: The playing fields of foreign affairs and big government...the attraction is not to be denied.

CARLSON: Unbelievable. It was the best job I ever had.

Q: How did you get into the Voice of America?

CARLSON: Well, I really became the Director of the Voice of America by a fluke. I would love to say that they recognized my basic good judgment, but that isn't the case. The situation in the winter of 1985 was that the Voice of America Director had been Gene Pell. Gene had taken the position after Ken Tolinson left. Ken went on to become the editor-in-chief of Reader's Digest. Gene Pell was a very experienced newsman and quite a commanding figure in some ways, who when he went through his confirmation hearings was asked questions and gave responses that said he would stay in this position throughout the Administration.

There had been a turnover...they had a couple of VOA directors. The first one in the Reagan Administration was a nice man by the name of Jim Conley but he was totally savaged by the internal bureaucracy. He was naive. He came to the job as a friend of Wick's. He had had a lot of success in the music business but didn't know anything about the media and he didn't know anything about public diplomacy, or public affairs. He didn't realize that you have to be extraordinarily careful about what you say. He stepped into the beginnings of the Reagan Administration.There was probably considerable hostility or suspicion about the motives of these Reagan people, particularly in these foreign affairs agencies. Jim Conley came in and during his first week he was interviewed on tape by the newsroom staff ostensively for a house newsletter. He was asked lots of questions that would be difficult for anyone, much less for someone who never thought about these things his whole life. They had to do with the First Amendment, the philosophy of news and free flow of information, and just things that your average citizen, however nice they may be, has never given much thought to. Jim Conley basically tripped and fell pretty resoundingly.

Then, of course, the tape showed up in transcribed form at the Washington Post. I think it was on the front page. So Jim Conley was basically eaten alive and left, a very unhappy guy.

So when Gene Pell went three or four years later before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he made pretty strong affirmative statements about staying, keeping this job until the end. Then, almost immediately turned around and succumbed to the blandishments of Malcolm Forbes, Jr, Chairman of the Board of the Board for International Broadcasting, who offered Gene the Presidency of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty.

Gene announced about a month on the job that he was leaving. And Charles Wick hit the roof over this. I had not arrived yet. When I arrived a senior Foreign Service Officer named Mort Smith, who was in charge of the modernization program of VOA had taken over the Voice. Mort was a very capable person, but the Administration and Wick wanted a political appointee in the job. So it had been vacant when I arrived in November for a couple of months.Come February, Wick was desperate to find someone for the position. I was the spokesman for the Agency and had nothing to do with this. I noticed its vacancy and would have liked the job, but after all I had just arrived and it seemed overly aggressive even for me to try to get this job. Wick and Marvin Stone informed me one day that they had a candidate and did I know who he was. I am embarrassed to say I don't remember his name at the moment. But he was a former president of ABC news and I did know of him by reputation. I had actually met him and driven him around San Francisco years ago when I was a flunky reporter. He had retired from ABC and gone to Ford Motor Company and was a public affairs, or something like that...a big time thing...and was available for appointment and they wanted him. He was a qualified guy. They were going to make him the offer, but before they did, they decided that they would have him vetted by some conservative groups in Washington.

Q: A conservative Republican group?

CARLSON: Yes, or at least right wing conservative group. So they set up a lunch with this fellow and a number of conservatives. I am not sure who was present at the lunch, but they generally involved Ed Fulner, from the Heritage Foundation; Roy Cohn from New York, McCarthy's aide years ago; Reed Irvine from AIM, a conservative media watchdog group. They sat with this fellow and asked him, among other things, who he voted for in the election in 1980. He told them he wasn't going to tell them...it was none of their business who he voted for. So they in turn said, "Well, yes it is our business if you are going to be a political appointee." So they had a standoff.

They then put pressure on the White House personnel office not to accept this fellow as Director of Voice of America without saying who he voted for. That is all that was mentioned to me.

So one day, Charles Wick said, "I am going to a lunch put on by Ed Fulner and Roy Cohn. Why don't you come with me? Marvin and I are going. We are going to try and talk them into accepting Bill (Inaudible), because he is a great person and will be a great director." So I went to the lunch with them. I was really a staff guy so I didn't say much. I sat next to Jesse Helms' chief deputy at the lunch...oh, they were involved in this as well. I was informed by Wick that there was a little secret deal here, that Roy Cohn and Ed Fulner were really trying to help Wick. They were the more pragmatic of these people and were perfectly willing to accept this appointee whether he voted for Reagan or didn't. They thought he was fine, but the others didn't.

The man from Jesse Helms' office sat to my left and he raised hell about this appointment. In effect he said, "Mr. Wick, if you try to push this through we are going to bloody the halls with you." Charles Wick said, "Well, I guess I could jump out the window now." And there was laughter. But Wick was clearly frustrated. This man said, "You know, this guy was the President of ABC. ABC television is the most egregious of all of the networks. They are the most anti-Republican, etc." I had run for mayor of San Diego and had worked for ABC for many years. So I said, "Well, I think that is wrong. It is not true that ABC is the worse of them all. The people who work at ABC are not in some conspiracy against the conservative people or against Republicans. That is just not true." So I defended this guy even though I was sort of embarrassed because it wasn't my place to do it.

So later, when we left, Wick said, "Obviously we have lost this. There is no way I can do anything, but I like what you said. Thank you." So in the car on the way back I thought I would be perfect as Director of VOA and wished they would think about me for the job. I went to my office and sat down...I have a friend who has some considerable political clout and was thinking about calling him and saying, "Look, I can't do this by myself. Why don't you call Wick, you know him, and suggest that I be the VOA Director." And I was going to explain to him what had happened.

My phone rang and it was Marvin Stone. He said, "Would you come up and see me for a minute?" I went up and Wick was in his office. This was literally 20 minutes later after parting at the elevators. Marvin Stone or, perhaps Wick, said, "How would you like to be VOA Director?" I said, "Well, I would like that very much. I am amazed that you ask." They said, "Well, we were thinking about it and I said to Marvin, 'You know, God damn it, Carlson would be perfect for this job.'" I said, "Why do you think that?" He said, "Because you have media experience, you can write a simple declarative sentence. They won't rise up against you at the Voice because you have been a reporter, and editor, etc. If they attempted that, you have enough sense not to let it happen to you. And you have been in politics, at least in a peripheral way." I said, "Well, I accept."

So that, I think, was a Friday. I went to the Voice of America on Monday. I made an announcement...There were quite a few employees there, almost 3000 in total...about 1700 in that building which is across the street from USIA. I made an announcement as to who I was and why I was there, I was the acting director. That was in March 1986. Then the Administration proposed me that summer as the permanent director and I went through confirmation hearings, which were successful.

Pete Wilson came with me, along with his wife, put his arm around my neck...I will tell you an amusing vignette. I went through hearings with two ambassadors, both Foreign Service Officers and first time ambassadors. One of them was going to the United Arab Emirates. The three of us were sitting at the table before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I had brought, somewhat pompously, this US Senator thinking it would help me with the Senators. Pete Wilson, they deferred to him immediately, spoke and said nice things about me. He said, "I would like to introduce Mrs. Carlson, who is a good friend of my wife, and sitting with my wife right there in the front row." All this cheap political posturing. And that was it. Senator Lugar was the acting chairman. He said, "Mr. Carlson, rather than have you read your statement now, hold off, let's meet the other two candidates." They are sitting with me. Senator Lugar said, "Do you have your families with you as well?" This one ambassador stood up and said, "Yes, I do. They are right there. My wife and daughter." And these two women stood up. And he was nervous and forgot his wife's name. He said, "My wife..." And she said, "Mary." And the whole audience laughed. He said, "I am so embarrassed. Yes, of course, 'Mary'". And I thought I was nervous.

That is how I became the VOA Director.

Q: I have never served with the VOA but I have always thought that here is an organization that is enmeshed in ethnic currents and all because you have people who all have their own ax to grind. How did you find the atmosphere and what were the major problems?

CARLSON: This is an odd intersection, if you have journalism with diplomacy they are not mutually compatible. We had about 3000 employees. We were broadcasting in 46 languages. The people who make up the language services are intelligent, often accomplished in a previous life in another country, are now GS-13s or 12s, and are laboring to bring news and information back to the people they have left. There are exceptions to this, but the vast majority of the language services are made up of people who are obviously sufficiently sophisticated in the language and culture to effectively broadcast and probably come from the area they are broadcasting to. There are some exceptions. We had an Italian chief of the Chinese section, actually the greatest round-eyed Mandarin speaker around, but he was an exception...a Foreign Service Officer named Tony Sereedi...but otherwise they were people who were ethnically rooted. Of course they came in many instances from societies where there were no straight lines, where deceit and duplicity and lack of forthcomingness was the order of the day. You bring them to Washington and with all the other cultural differences and put them in a mix with people who represent cultures, to which they are enemies, and give them the protection of the civil service, they are not easy to manage.

At the same time journalists are typically solo operators, not team players. They tend to be arrogant; think they know it all. And these are people who are broadcasting in many cases in esoteric languages. We started the Tibetan Service, Osseree in Georgia, etc. And they are mad. They are mad as hell at the place they came from. If they came from Afghanistan they were tortured and want revenge. They were involved in a world of ethnic politics.

The Soviet Division was absolutely the worse. The most interesting, but the most difficult to manage. You couldn't get a straight answer out of anybody. If you said, "Did you do this?" "No, I didn't do that, he did." They would accuse each other constantly. I was the recipient immediately of notes over the transom and late night phone calls. They always had an Eastern European accept or something. "Mr. Carlson, you don't know me, but..." Then he would tell me some unbelievable story about somebody being in the Nazi Party, or used to be in the Nazi Party but now the Communist Party and was an intelligence agent, etc. We had a lot of that. It was a great problem.

We had Services who were the targets of foreign intelligence...the Cuban Service, the Afghanistan Service, the Burmese Service, Bulgarian Service, etc. If you accepted the efficacy of these broadcasts, if you felt that they made a difference in the political lives of these countries, and they did, you could easily accept how it would be of use to foreign governments to get an inside handle on what is going on.

It was a great management challenge.

Q: How could you manage Azerbaijanis? How would you know what they were saying? How could you monitor and keep track of all these things to see that they were on course?

CARLSON: It is a difficult thing, but this has been done for almost 50 years, the Voice of American has been in business for 50 years, and you sort of learn the tricks after a while. The management responsibilities are couched in such a way with oversight from producers and sort of line managers and the deputy director and chief of writers and the Service director...often the head of the Service would be a Foreign Service officer in many instances and generally spoke the languages. The oversights that were built in were fairly sophisticated because of the obvious fear of slanting or tilting. There would be no way that you could do it systematically.

A lot of people listen to these broadcasts and you might get by with something on a momentary basis, which caused some fears in itself that someone will call for revolution or to do something particularly outrageous...but there were some checks and balances having to do with the person who wrote it wasn't the person who read it, and that kind of thing. In problematic parts of the world we did have some instances where there was some funny business, but we caught it immediately.

One time while I was there a Russian wrote a script about the May Day parade in Moscow. It was not caught before it went on the air. He changed the positions of all the senior nomenclature, where they were standing...

Q: Oh yes, it was the way of figuring who was up and who was down.

CARLSON: Sure. It threw the KGB into a turmoil when they heard it. I am sure they thought something was coming because he had everybody's position reversed. The head of the KGB was standing in a place where he really wasn't, and stuff like that. Well, somebody noticed it almost immediately...within the house they noticed it. We moved him from the building.

At first he said he didn't do it and then he said he did do it but had taken too many antihistamine. I said that I didn't care what he said I wanted him out of the building. Then there are all these safeguards that prevent that. You can't remove a person unless there is a physical threat of violence, etc. But my theory was that all we had was the product here and you cannot tamper with the product. Anybody who does that goes. I didn't care what. He could sue us, etc. So we physically removed him from the building. He did sue us and he lost. I can't believe he lost, but he did.

It was so important that we make sure that people realized that whatever you did...if a Bulgarian stabbed a Romanian in the men's room, which happened, that is one thing. But if you screwed around with what went on the air, you are out of here.

The management aspects were difficult. We did institute, when I was there, a more sophisticated program oversight. We had an Office of Program Review. What I had them do was once a week they would without warning descend on a program Service...in a friendly way. They would come in without announcement and would ask for a number of hours of tapes and would take them arbitrarily from the previous week, would take the scripts from which the tapes were prepared, would take the original English copy from which often it had been translated from that...in some cases we had correspondents in Russian language and in Ukrainian and didn't rely on wire copy but did their own reportage.

We would collect all the documents to support the broadcasts. We would take tapes of the music of the features, not just the news, and then send them up for independent analysis, usually an academic, somebody who taught the appropriate language. They would review the tapes for pronunciation, sophistication, current use of language, audience appeal...dovetailed with one's knowledge of the audience, which was very good by the way...

You can't run a broadcasting outfit without knowing what the audience likes. If you are the National Inquirer you give them only what they like; if you are the New York Times you give them what you think they want and what you think they want or need. And we would do that. Our research was sophisticated. We did it with Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty and the BBC. We were so sensitive in our research in the Soviet Union we could pretty well tell if our listenership went up by a point. RFE did a thousand interviews a month, and did for many, many years with traveling Soviet citizens, breaking them down into residency, occupation, age, sex, party membership, and what listened to. They do them outside the Soviet Union and are pretty effective, actually. So we kept close tabs on that.

After the review we would have a public session done by the office where they would bring in the musicologist, the academic persons who had reviewed the tapes for the faithfulness of the translation...anybody could come from the Voice and sit in...they would do a critique, a general discussion of how we could make it better. At the same time, of course, we watched out for funny coverage, or spin of some kind.

Of course, it is free of foreign policy directive as well. You may or may not be aware of this, but the Voice in its news content, which is really what drives the place...no policy objectives played a role in the news.

Q: Here you had for the time quite a conservative White House. The President was still talking about the evil empire of the Soviet Union. Here is the Voice of America and it is almost anathema at that time to try to be evenhanded...you were on the wrong side of God, or something like that. When you arrived, how did you find it and what were the pressures?

CARLSON: Maintaining the evenhandedness of the product of the news output was not difficult in the context of the administration. It was just difficult because it is not an easy thing period. I think it is always a problem. You get a lot of people with conflicting views and different pressures and all that. But I don't think I was any different probably than the Washington Post or anywhere else. The administration, during the time I was there, didn't make runs on us generally speaking. The administration, actually, had no idea of what the Voice really did in a broad sense. It wasn't like picking up the Post every day, then you read it every day and get a pretty good idea of what is good and what isn't. They didn't know. I know that.

Occasionally an overseas post would have a fit about something. Why are you guys doing this? That is not right. And they might be right. Sometimes they would be right. I don't mean they would be right in saying, "Why did you cover this, we don't want you to cover that." What we said was that we don't take that directive, I'm sorry. Once we say the post can tell us what to cover, it would never end. I had an NSC guy call me who was involved in sensitive negotiations with the Laotians over MIAs.

Q: Missing In Action...a residue from the Vietnam War.

CARLSON: Exactly. He was in charge of this at the NSC and was very concerned. For instance, at one time he didn't want us to cover a demonstration in front of the Laotian...I think it may have been the Laotian delegation in New York...because we would be broadcasting it in Lao. He didn't care whether the New York Times covered it. He cared whether the Voice covered it because the Laotians would know about it in Laos. We were the only outside voice in Laos, for the people in Laos, in their native language. I told him that I can't do that, I am sorry. We would have to make that judgment based on its news appeal or not. I am not going to descend down into the Laos Service and tell them what to do. And we didn't. I felt he was being melodramatic, but I don't know. He said that it would jeopardize these negotiations. Well, I didn't want to do that, but on the other hand, I'm sorry. It would have to come from a higher level and be put in writing, and then we would think about it. There was no way he was going to put that in writing, so too bad.

My point is, the administration didn't really ever set up a policy guy who was going to sit and pay attention to our output to make sure it represents the administration in its news. Our belief was, and I felt it...that I hung my partisan jacket at the door in running this outfit. There was no way you could run it with partisan views expressed, I didn't feel. I don't think you could do it successfully. The law in effect says that the news of the Voice of America should be objective, balanced and fair. It doesn't say it represents the administration's point of view.

There is room for the administration's perspective, meaning the State Department and the White House, in foreign policy editorials. That is where I felt and feel was the proper role for policy. The editorials were 3 or 4 minutes in length, they explicated a foreign policy issue from the point of view of the administration and the State Department. They were very useful to the listeners. I truly believe that. They said, "This is the editorial view of the United States Government. It believes the following thing."

Our listeners, very sophisticated people in many ways, and by the millions, were interested in what the US Government's foreign policy view is. There is nothing wrong with that. We are not proselytizing them, we are saying what it is. And in an attractive way too. We offer a rationale for the view which is held by the administration. But we are not weaving it into our news coverage. We are not selecting stories to support it. We are not eliminating people to be interviewed because they don't parrot that perspective. We are simply putting it forth as an editorial. We are keeping it separate from the news.

I, in fact, did the voice introduction and conclusion. "The following is an editorial representing the view of the United States Government." At the end it said, "What you just heard was the view of the United States Government." The Services ran it once a day, sometimes twice. That was where policy came in. But otherwise the policy people stayed out of the clothing of VOA journalists. And that is my interpretation of the way the law is and that is the way we ran it. And we didn't have a problem with that, actually.

Q: Here you are being vetted. You have already talked about how you got the job, because somebody didn't pass the political litmus test.

CARLSON: They didn't give me the test. Nobody ever asked me how I voted.

Q: Was this a misconception?

CARLSON: Yes. They didn't understand how the Voice operates. They had an understandable but I think a somewhat naive view of the way it really ran. And, of course, I knew nothing about it before I arrived. But I think they felt that the person running it descended down into the trenches sufficient to make it spin in a way that would be appealing to the administration. That wasn't true. That isn't to say the director doesn't have some influence, but influence of the kind that I think they might have had in mind doesn't exist. I mean, if any Director of the Voice of America thought that he or she could come in and dictate a change in news policy to the newsroom of hundreds of journalist ...these are people who used to work at Time magazine, or at NBC, etc. They were not going to put up with this interference. There is no way they would. These are people with friends on the Hill, in the newspapers, and a sense of their own purpose and a sense of the wrongness of somebody telling them that and they wouldn't abide it. You wouldn't survive for a week if you tried to do something like that. I am not even addressing the rightness or wrongness of it, but pragmatically it is not possible. And these people didn't know that. These people, whether well intended or not, they were political people.

In my case, I think they got involved in this fight over this fellow and they won. So suddenly, Wick says, "Okay, you won. I give up. I won't try and nominate him." It was kind of like this. "I have a guy. Remember the fellow who said he was from ABC?" They may have said, "He seemed like a reasonable fellow." And then Wick probably said, "He ran for the mayor of San Diego and was a Republican." And I think that did it because they never said a word to me. So it really wasn't important. It had more to do with power.

Q: You are coming from a period...I am a man in my mid-'60s and have watched the change in journalism, particularly on public broadcasting...the reporting seems to be getting much more personal. People are going there, I have a feeling they are rather young, bleeding hearts and they are talking about "Isn't this awful" and you can't help but have a very personal point of view.

CARLSON: Time and Newsweek are a good example.

Q: This is going on and one is not getting what I consider good solid news. It is more feelings. Here you have these people all over the world reporting on events, and particularly the time you are talking about because this was coming into vogue, and you are trying to have a fairly objective thing and yet here are people going out and allowed to display their feelings as part of news. Was there a problem with this?

CARLSON: Yes, occasionally. Particularly the worldwide English people. They are Americans and were born in this country, educated here, middle class people. They are journalists. They read the Washington Post and kind of want to be like the journalists here. They see these changes as well...a more advocacy role for reporters. Many of them don't succumb to it, but some do. They didn't succumb to it long because I knew the business as the Supreme Court Justice knows pornography...I know it when I see it and I am not going to put up with this. And I didn't put up with it. We didn't put up with it.

I hired a program director, Sid Davis, used to be the NBC bureau chief here. He is still the program director. He was a sophisticated journalist. He believed as I did in the absolute necessity for neutral journalism, to make it as neutral and balanced as you can. There are lots of problems with that. I know it can be in the eye of the beholder. But you also know it when you see it. I don't want to come away from a news story knowing what the reporter thinks, where it is clear that the reporter loves this person or hates this person. I don't want that. People know that. And that is very fair. It is very defensible in my opinion that we are broadcasting in many instances to people who live in a media barren society, whether it is in Ghana or even in the tough places like the Soviet Union, and they get stuff that has a spin on it all the time. It seems a pathetic irony to me for the US Government and the taxpayers to be paying to give them something that has a spin on it too. Aren't the interests of democracy served very well by us presenting in the fairest way possible a full range of facts and let those people make up their own minds about America in the roles that are played by these various countries. That seems to me the service we ought to preform. That helps the administration, I believe. That helps the country. That justifies the citizenry paying for this. That it is of use to the citizens of other parts of the world to get some fair treatment from us intellectually. That is what I saw our role as being.

True, we can peruse the foreign policy aspects in a more focused way with the editorials. And that is fair too. And, in fact, I did a show...I was host of a show called "On The Line." I hosted it for a number of years. It was a weekly radio show with 10 million listeners. Not because it was so good, but because we had so many listeners. It was a foreign policy show. I would have guests on every week. It was designed to explain an aspect of US foreign policy to listeners abroad. We didn't try to sell them, but on the other hand it fell into the editorial function. It was a biased show in that I did not attempt...we clearly made this decision...we didn't attempt to bring in people who represented every aspect of a problem.

Q: You didn't bring in a Soviet spokesman...

CARLSON: No we didn't. And it was designed for that and we said so. It wasn't a mask or anything. The show offered up to you a view of American foreign policy. There were disputes, but in the context of well-meaning people in the State Department or something. We didn't balance far left or far right, or something like that. I thought that was a legitimate use of the government's airwaves and it certainly had a policy objective to it.

But the news was as sacrosanct as we could make it. I just believe that as soon as you allowed for policy...it is well intentioned and nothing pejorative about a diplomat wanting, desiring us to broadcast in a certain way...I can understand that. I guess if you had your own radio station you would be prone to do that, but it is not good.

It doesn't really contribute to the common weal in the grand sense, in my view, and it also can descend down into the worse kind of behavior you could imagine, if you turned it over to any administration and said they could do anything they wanted. Anything in the administration's interest we would broadcast it. That is what Radio Moscow does. That is crazy. So we decided that we should never let the door open at all. And as appealing as it is to have a Marine Colonel call me and tell me this emotional story about getting back the bodies of dead service men, I thought that that was horrifying, the idea that we might interfere with that. On the other hand, how do I know he is telling the truth. I had a few other passes made at me like that, one of which I will tell you.

At one point when Fang Lizhi the Chinese dissident was in the US Embassy in Beijing where he sought refuge, there were delicate negotiations with the Chinese government to get him out. He was there for many months. We finally got him out and he was due to speak before Congress. This was in 1991. The USIA Director, Bruce Gelb, an appointee by Bush, came to me one morning and said, "Do you know that Fang Lizhi is coming down to Washington?" "Yes, I read that." And he said, "Are you going to do an interview with him in Chinese?" "Well, I am sure we are." He said, "Well, I don't want you to broadcast any interview in Chinese to China." "Why is that?" He said, "Well, I don't think it will be good because there is a little agreement between the US government and the Chinese not to do that. They want him to keep a low profile." I said, "Gee, Bruce, I don't think I can do that. I have a Chinese Service who in effect went through the Battle of Britain. During the Tiananmen Square they were 24 hours..."

Q: We are talking about a student uprising in Beijing which was forcefully put down and very much on the front pages. The Chinese old guard was and still is hanging on today.

CARLSON: And Fang Lizhi was a hero to these people as a man who put his life on the line. And the idea that the New York Times could interview Fang Lizhi and everybody in Newark, New Jersey could read it, that is great. But we, and the BBC, are the sources of outside information to tens of millions of Chinese people in their native language. And the idea that we shouldn't either interview or broadcast an interview with a man like that to China is a big mistake.

So anyway, I said, "I can't do that Bruce." He said, "Well you have to." He then told me that he had had some discussions with an Assistant Secretary in the State Department that morning at the Secretary's meeting and had promised him that we would not run any interviews. I said, "Well, I am sorry. You can't make those promises." Anyway he put a lot of pressure on me over this. We did it anyway. Not out of spitefulness. I told Sid Davis this and he was horrified when I told him what Bruce had said. I actually went back to Bruce and said, "Look, Bruce, if anybody ever found out that you did this, do you remember what the Washington Post and the press did to Larry Eagleburger and General Scowcroft when they flew to Beijing and did the Maotai with the Chinese leadership?" This was perfectly understandable because there was no way they could not do it, but it made it seem frivolous on...

Q: This was after Tiananmen Square. It looked like we were being too cozy with the Chinese.

CARLSON: It looked like Neville Chamberlain or something like that. They were made to look like appeasers. I said, "Can you imagine what would happen to President Bush if the press found out that his administration on the heels of all this criticism prevented a dissident, the best known of them, from having his voice, words and thoughts carried into China? From a practical political point of view you would be sinking the President's ship. I don't think the President would go along with this."

Anyway, he even called me...I went on a trip with my children to Maine and he called me. I even had a lunatic conversation with him on a public telephone where I said, "Bruce, you can't say these things on the telephone." He went on about all manner of classified things on the telephone insisting that we not do this.

But we did it anyway. It ran in China. The Assistant Secretary to whom he allegedly had made this promise hit the roof supposedly and Bruce hit the roof with me. Too bad, at that point I wasn't speaking to him much anyway.

But that was typical of the kind of lunacy...this was a guy who was a terribly inadequate fellow and not up to the job and was not a very good political appointee. He didn't know how to handle any of these things.

I have to go to lunch...

Q: Today is March 15, 1993. This is a second interview with Ambassador Richard Carlson. Mr. Ambassador, could you describe your relationship to the BBC, because in the overseas field people appear to be either BBC listeners or VOA listeners. What was the element of cooperation, competition? How did you see it in your time?

CARLSON: We felt quite competitive with the BBC in many geographic areas. I hesitate there because the BBC successes in some parts of the world simply couldn't be duplicated by us because of...probably because of historic reasons, and in some instances because of the pervasiveness and the reach of transmitters that they had been able to position through their relationships with foreign governments.

We, at the Voice of America, had a pretty successful, ongoing relationship with the leadership of the BBC World Service. The World Service, of course, with the BBC is our competition. It was headed by John Tusa for many years, who just recently announced that he was stepping down and going on to resume being a presenter with BBC within Great Britain.

Let me give you a couple of examples. The British put quite powerful transmitters into Hong Kong because of their relationship and control of Hong Kong at the time. We were unable to get on behalf of our Chinese Service transmitters that were as powerful as those close enough. However, in the case of Chinese, our Chinese Service...I am speaking of Mandarin...was so good that though our signal wasn't quite as pervasive in China as the British, we were much more listened to. And unknown number of Chinese, but conceivably as high as a hundred million Chinese, listened to the Voice of American every day in Mandarin. When I was in the Voice we instituted a Cantonese Service. The changes in China and the loosening up in an economic way, seemed to be concentrated more in the south.

Q: Yes, where Cantonese was spoken more.

CARLSON: Yes. So we had a very large, 500,000 watt median wave transmitter in the Philippines. We could send a signal right across the South China Sea that hit most of that southern portion of the coast of China where there are tens of millions of people living. The signal itself went across the ocean and then in probably 25 miles went all the way from Vietnam to the south and quite a ways up to the north. So the Cantonese Service ended up being a fairly popular thing.

The BBC...it is interesting, people who travel a lot, particularly Americans, would say to me a lot that the BBC is better than the Voice of America. Of course they were always talking about the English Service because they don't listen in another language. They didn't realize that the Voice of America's largest and most successful audiences are in foreign languages. Secondly, the Voice was not designed to broadcast to traveling Americans or ex-patriot Americans. It was designed to communicate with foreign citizens.

Beyond that, however, I always thought they were wrong and probably Anglophiliac in their statements. They were confusing class tones and the method of delivery that affluence people sort of liked about the BBC. Probably the more class neutral accents of broadcasters at the Voice of America didn't really appeal to them.

I was always amazed by the fact that often these people if you attempted to fathom their politics would probably describe themselves as populous, but in fact they were class ridden and snobbish. The intellectual content of Voice matched up with the BBC World Service, and that was something that we did on a regular basis.

Just like ABC and NBC, hopefully, take a look at each other and try to figure out what makes each of them popular to viewers or listeners. Our content was every bit as good as the BBC's. The news standards that were used by the Voice of America were the same as American journalist standards and every bit as good as those used by the BBC.If you hear a tone of irritation in my voice, I am irritated about it because it was so God damn misplaced. I would get this kind of statement from legislators, or people who had some control over your life and who had listened to the BBC 8 times, or twice when they were sitting somewhere and didn't know squat about it. We had thousands of people whose whole raison tete was trying to be honest, straight-forward, unvarnished, balanced and impartial in their presentations and I would end up testifying somewhere and having some no-nothing say to me, "Well, why aren't you as good as the BBC? Why aren't you as independent as the BBC?"

As a matter of fact, the BBC's employees, as you may know, are vetted by the British Security Service. We always suffered at the Voice from...and the Voice suffers from this now...constant whining from some quarters, who ought to know better, about the fact that the CIA probably controls the content of the Voice. Well, if you want to throw that out you can claim that MI6 controls the content of BBC. It doesn't and CIA and State don't control the content of Voice news, either.

Q: I used to get the same thing as a professional consular officer. People would say, "Well, I have always been told that while I'm abroad if I am really in trouble to go to the British Embassy." It used to annoy the hell out of me. I knew what the British Embassy did. If you didn't have a high political profile in Britain, we were really more responsive because we knew Congress was on our necks.

CARLSON: Yes, and we were more democratic actually.

Q: Yes. I know what you mean and I think a lot of people in the Foreign Service listened more to BBC than the Voice of America but there was a reason there. Listening to the BBC gave you a feel for what the British were looking at. I would listen to it more mainly because I was getting my American news and wanted to find out what the Brits were up to.

CARLSON: And to make an evaluation as to how good the Voice of America is and how it matches up to the BBC is rather a complex task. And, as I said, it is not just a matter of matching the worldwide English services, it is taking them bit by bit. In fact, I used to laugh with John Tusa, I would say, "Well, look, I will give you my Georgian Service." The joke was that it was the worse in the Voice of America, but it was made up of people who had the protection of the US Civil Service and you can't fire them just because you don't think they are very good. It is very difficult to get rid of people. My Georgian Service was lousy, my Russian Service was excellent. The Mandarin Service was infinitely better than the British Mandarin Service. And it varied with what we were talking about. In many cases the British didn't broadcast in the languages that we broadcast in. They were very successful in former colonies, for instance. To pull away listeners from habits that were ingrained over decades was very difficult.

The BBC relationship with the Voice of America at the senior level was very good. We had an exchange program wherein we sent journalists to the BBC for a year and they in turn would send somebody. We always had at least one of them in our newsroom. Every year the four or five top managers of BBC would come and visit us for a week in Washington and we in turn would visit them in London at Bush House.

There was also a close cooperative relationship between...BBC has a monitoring service that monitors foreign broadcasts and there is considerable joint cooperation between FBIS (Foreign Broadcast Information Service of the US Government) and the British monitoring service. There were so many frequencies in so many languages and so much information traveling through the air that it was impossible for the BBC monitors or US Government to take it all.

Of course it is enormously valuable in building political pictures, of making evaluations of what a foreign government might be considering doing or is thinking as reflected in the public airwaves. So these very sophisticated analyzes are performed by both the British monitors and the US Government...the CIA, of course, runs FBIS. Much information is available to the public. It is not a covert thing. And it is very, very useful, in my view. So we were interested in foreign broadcasts and therefore had a very close relationship with the BBC because of that.

Q: You were talking about your Mandarin Service as being one of your premier Services. It appears that the Voice of America got very much into the whole "abortive revolution". Could you explain a little bit of what Tiananmen Square was and developments maybe before that from your perspective of how we were covering these major events in China?

CARLSON: The student demonstrations began in Shanghai a considerable time before they concluded in Tiananmen Square with the death of students.

Q: This was in 1989.

CARLSON: The Voice of America happened to have a correspondent, who was Mandarin speaking and in Shanghai when this happened. He was actually attached to the bureau out of Beijing, but had gone down to Shanghai. He was present when they had this demonstration in the center of Shanghai. They went beyond what would have been anticipated. It was interesting. We had the only on the scene coverage from foreign correspondents in Shanghai. He was pursued by thousands of students that found out that he represented the Voice of America. They weren't pursuing him hostilely they were all kissing and hugging him. The poor guy was almost trampled to death. His reports were the only reliable news out of Shanghai when those demonstrations began. And, of course, they were of interest to the American press and were used as a basis for some coverage.

But the real interest was that they were broadcast back into China, of course, in Chinese. No matter what the New York Times does or says, or whatever is broadcast at NBC, it is irrelevant to these hundreds of millions of Chinese. It doesn't come to them in their language and doesn't get to their ears, and the Voice does. So we stepped up our coverage beginning with those demonstrations and, I think in retrospect most people would agree that what we delivered to the Chinese was very sophisticated and very well done.

We had a Chinese Service that was preparing in essences for this for many years. They were au courant with China as much as one could be with a closed society. They had sources and people who were willing to give them information in China as the Chinese loosened up economically and allowed more telephone calls to be made out of the country and into the country. When they allowed faxed machines to be used for commerce, they couldn't shut it down. It was amazing. Our Chinese Service when the demonstrations really started rolling in different cities would receive phone calls from China by the dozens if not the hundreds daily from people who listened to the Voice of America and who were in cahoots with an operator somewhere who would let them use the telephone that was used by some government office that was closed at the moment to call the Voice of America. Every day we received hundreds of phone calls from throughout China with people volunteering information.

The opportunity for provocation, of course, was pretty good because it was difficult to cross reference information. So we never relied on anonymous voices coming to us from China, but we used those as contacts and background. In fact, in almost every instance it was believed that they were not provocative trying to push us into...

Q: You were probably ahead of the Chinese Secret Service. Everything was moving too fast for them.

CARLSON: Yes, they couldn't get control. Even though the Chinese security apparatus is very sophisticated and not noticeable and just pretty good, it is funny that right up until Tiananmen Square you could feel...I was in the Chinese Service every day and as the events unfolded up to Tiananmen Square, you could watch the Chinese government finally get its hands around this leakage. The phone calls began reducing and reducing. The last phone call that came through was from the city of Wuhan. Somebody was calling from a phone overlooking the bridge, in a building of some kind, and the operator said in Chinese that this is so exciting, we have a woman on the line who wants to tell you what is going on and this may be our last call. And it was the last call. We never got any phone calls after that. They had succeeded in squeezing off all the lines.

But the impact in China of these broadcasts was enormous. It did in China what it had done in the Soviet Union for many years what Radio Liberty, the BBC and the Voice had done. It brought news of dissident activity from one person to another, other than through underground information. And it told people that there were others like them and think like them who have taken some courageous measure publicly in another town. It clearly kept alive the democratic hopes of these people.

I traveled to China a couple of times. I was told then, and we kept abreast of this through the American Embassy and other sources, at the time that the Chinese students would record the Voice of America broadcast, would use them often for the basis for wall posters. Or would record them on cheap tape recorders and when the electricity went out at night, which it did regularly in the universities, people would sit by candle light and replay the Voice of America broadcast.

There were in fact people who were sentenced to severe prison terms for calling the Voice of America. I forgot to mention that to you. There was a person who received 10 or 12 years in a re-educative effort for making one of those calls. He got caught making one of those phone calls to the Voice. Somebody recognized him on the phone and tracked him down.

Q: While this was going on...the role of the Voice of America...1956 must have hung heavily. There were accusations that the United States, not necessarily the Voice of America, were calling on the Hungarians in 1956 to basically revolt. Here you are talking about the most populous nation in the world and you are talking about something that could have been the mother of all revolutions going on. It was aborted, but the Voice of America was obviously a key element in this. No matter what you did you were adding fuel by just giving news. Could you talk a little bit about what you were doing and what the pressures were? People must have been saying, "For God's sake." You were in the middle of a fire.

CARLSON: We took no policy direction from State Department over this, nor was any offered other than that we had a great concern that we not purposely throw fuel on the fire. Clearly, philosophically, any kind of coverage of this kind of tumultuous event in a closed society tends to spur the thought in others that they might emulate the behavior that is being discussed. That is a by-product, in a neutral sense, of news coverage. The only thing that we did, and we do this normally anyway, we were damn careful to err on the side of conservative description. We didn't omit information because it was per se provocative. It was such a provocative event anyway.

But we felt that we had to be extraordinarily careful anyway so as to not unnecessarily inflame people. The inherent, inflammatory nature of all of this was such that we felt...these were people who live in an environment where punches are pulled all the time. Nobody ever tells them the truth. Everything is sugar coated and sort of spruced up to look different than it really is and that is not what we are there for. We are there to give them a fair and impartial view of what is going on in the world, and in this case their own country. We really played the role of a surrogate broadcaster which we don't normally do. There really are no surrogate broadcasters in China as there were in the Soviet Union through Radio Liberty, for instance. But we ended up being the surrogate broadcaster.

One of the things that I did do that I thought might be useful was to put a television camera in the Mandarin studio. We were broadcasting live on radio as opposed to the Chinese who put everything on tape and had a committee involved which would take a week to get it on the air. We put a TV camera in the studio from which we were broadcasting Mandarin and we scrolled across the screen the Mandarin copy that was being read in live time by the newscaster. So on the screen you would see, if you were looking, a Chinese broadcaster who was static and reading the copy and it would be scrolled across the bottom about where their chest was. We then transferred this by satellite and sent it down to satellite receiving dishes throughout the People's Republic of China.

Those dishes were all controlled by the government, of course, and in the control of the military in great measure. In military bases they invariably had satellite dishes that would receive transmission signals on behalf of their own government. We sent those signals into those dishes. The idea that we had was that the troops, themselves, would probably not be listening to the Voice of America because it was forbidden to do so, but that it would be useful to these military units and their leadership to be able to get a photographic image with the copy. We found out later that in fact wall posters were made out of photographs that were taken from the dishes.

There are so many of the dishes in control of the military and government, but not all of those people are interested in shutting off information. We probably offered some stability to remote...we like to think we did ...military units. There was considerable talk, as you remember, about the Chinese government bringing in troops from outside.

Q: The first troops obviously couldn't control it so they had to bring in sort of peasant troops from out in the countryside who had no love for the city folk. At least that was the story.

CARLSON: We thought it would be in the interests of all of them to have at least an honest representation of what was happening with these student demonstrations as opposed to what they would learn or not learn from government broadcasts.

Actually the Voice had relationship with some Chinese broadcasters. For many years the Voice had published...during the worse times in China, too, during those years of the cultural revolution...the Voice had published in conjunction with the Chinese government tens of millions little pamphlets about how to learn English. They used the Voice of America as a basis. The Voice broadcast in something called Special English. It has about 12-13,000 word vocabulary and if you understand those words you can understand any news story that is read in Special English. It is also read at about a third of the normal reading speed. So we would take those scripts...they were called words and their stories and it was English slang like "talking through your hat," or "carrying a big stick." What do those mean? We would print them in conjunction with a script that was read in conjunction in turn with the Chinese government and they would sell them for about a penny a piece.

Although they disliked the US and the West, they on their other hand had a commercial interest in people learning English. It was amazing, with all their anti-Western views at the time of the cultural revolution, they still continued to print in conjunction with us, probably by the billions, these little pamphlets. Special English was a powerful tool.

Regardless of the discomfort between the governments, the Voice had established relations with Radio Beijing, which kind of dominated people's radio in the PRC. I had gone over a couple of times and met with the head of Radio Beijing. Actually she came to the United States, too, and I gave a dinner party for her at the house. We came to know some of the broadcasters there. One of them went on the air during the Tiananmen Square event, when the government crushed the students, with a plea to the West to understand what was really going on in China in English. This was in their overseas service. He was taken off the air and he actually said that he was going to have to leave the air now...it was broadcast to Western Europe...and then he went off the air after this. He basically in about three minutes described what was going on in Tiananmen Square. He went to prison I was told. He had actually been in my house at one time. Anyway, it was all quite dramatic.

Q: George Bush had been our representative in China and knew the leadership and was considered to be closer to the leadership which was doing the repressing than he should have been. Were you getting any emanations from the White House on this?

CARLSON: No, actually we were not. Contrary to what people I imagine would expect we actually had none. If there was any contact with the White House it was minimal and it would have been through the National Security Council but there was never any attempt to impose on the Voice, and in turn its Chinese Service, any policy perspective or any spin or stress on certain areas with a lack of attention to other areas. There was none of that.

The Chinese Service was very well run, by the way. It was run by a Foreign Service Officer whose name was Tony Sereeti. He was of Italian descent and one of the finest linguist I have ever known. He spoke Chinese perfectly. He spoke Mandarin so well that Chinese thought he was Chinese on the phone. That is not an easy thing. He also spoke Cantonese. And he speaks Russian. He is an amazing guy.

I traveled with him in China. We were in Shanghai and went into a workingman's hotel one night and talked to the desk clerk about two in the morning. We just wanted to see what the place was like. No Westerner had ever been in side according to the woman. She went around to each room, where there would be 10 or 12 people and wake everybody up. They would all sit up and she would introduce me...we gave her Voice of America pins and she had one on...and she introduced me as the head of the Voice of America and Tony Sereeti as the chief of the Chinese Service. Well, they couldn't believe it. They were jumping all over the place talking to us. Sereeti was a fantastic guy.

Q: He must have been sitting rather heavily making sure the Service didn't get too excited.

CARLSON: Of course. This was not an easy thing. You have broadcasters with very strong emotional and intellectual and cultural ties to the area and they are angry at this and the government. And they were angry at each other, they have internecine conflicts which are so complex you could never get to the root of them all. Keeping them under control and insuring that there are safeguards to prevent a person from doing all manner of things that are limited only by your imagine is very hard. We always made it a very clear point that the people who wrote the copy didn't deliver the copy. There was also a producer in between. This was live, of course, and most people sitting around could understand what was being said. But, in fact, we very seldom had a problem.

In turn, the people who were employed by the Voice had a great sense of mission and usually a great sense of decorum. They had been there a long time and recognized the potency of what they were doing and the importance of precision and care. The most potentially difficult areas were the Soviet Services, Chinese, Lao, Cambodian, the Afghanistan languages, places where there were conflicts and people had strong emotional feelings about what was going on in the country that they often came from. Those would be the most problematic situation. And even then we didn't have any systemic problems, really.

Q: What about the aftermath, after the Chinese authorities had suppressed the students and all? What happened to the Voice of America at that point?

CARLSON: We had problems with our correspondents. Of course they kept throwing them out of the country. We had a correspondent, Al Poissen, and he was expelled. They were always being accused of intelligence activities. I can tell you they didn't engage in that. It would have been stupid. The Voice of America correspondents weren't spies, they were reporters, but unfortunately in the kind of society with the rigidity of the People's Republic you end up doing your things covertly simply because you can't do them in any other way.

Q: From a practical point of view if you are from the other side, a Voice of America correspondent is far more dangerous than a spy.

CARLSON: Oh, yes.

Q: Who cares what the Chinese military is doing, but if you are reporting the truth to the Chinese people...

CARLSON: I will give you an example of how they tried to compromise a correspondent. We had a correspondent there, a young man, who went into a club one night, some sort of a Chinese club. He was sitting with some friends when all of a sudden a Chinese girl came and sat in his lap. Suddenly a man took a photograph of this. The girl hopped off his lap. She seemed to be a transvestite. It was not totally clear, but he thought this was the case and since the happening was so strange he reported that this had happened to the Embassy security people.

Ultimately he came back to the United States and was working at the Voice newsroom and was going to be going to another country. He was walking down Independence Avenue when a fellow came up to him and started talking to him. He was a Soviet diplomat. They had a friendly conversation. About a week later he was sitting in a restaurant in Adams Morgan and the same fellow and another man came up to him at the table and laid the photograph from China of the apparently transvestite sitting in his lap.

At this point this fellow had married. He thought it was almost funny, this crude way to get him to cooperate, and then, in turn, he reported it. But there was obviously considerable collusion in Services, I guess.

Q: It was sort of amazing considering the distance and relations.

CARLSON: Of course, it could have been set up by the Soviets in the first place.

Q: Did you have a security problem with your correspondents?

CARLSON: Yes. Not necessarily with correspondents. They were harassed in China by the security services. Of course we had no correspondents in the Soviet Union at all. We didn't have a bureau in the Soviet Union until 1989 when I opened the bureau in Moscow. No VOA director had ever been in the Soviet Union in the past. They wouldn't let them in. We were jammed by the Soviets off and on for years.

But we did have a problem in some areas at the VOA with penetration attempts by foreign intelligence services. In my experience during the time I was there, they were directed at the Soviet division, at various of the language services and some of the Eastern European Services. Bulgaria was one that was a problem. A problem in a sense that it seemed to be of interest to the Bulgarian Secret Service. The Cuban Services were an ongoing problem. Radio Marti initially and then Television Marti, which we had responsibility for legislatively. The Afghan Services in Burma seemed to be a problem as well. Seemingly they were targets of penetration.

I would say that we had a counterintelligence allegation once a month...12 to 15 a year. These often took the form of...people who come from these closed societies grow up differently. Their life experiences are different and their methods of accounting for behavior and conduct and outcome are different.

Q: They are often justified.

CARLSON: Yes they are. They can't all be dismissed as paranoia. But it would be typical for me to get phone calls at home from someone with a pronounced European accent who didn't want to identify himself except that he worked in the Voice and knew that so-and-so worked for the KGB or often a Eastern Europe intelligence outfit. We would get letters to that effect.

Often we would get contacted by the FBI saying that in fact they thought there was something going on with such and such. We had a couple who actually fled a couple of steps ahead of the Bureau and who had been employed by us for some time. One was a man and his wife...the man worked for us the wife didn't...but they fled. They were stopped in the street and taken into the Bureau after having met with some intelligence agent. They were interrogated and denied everything and were due to be reinterrogated the following Monday or something and fled the country. There was never any publicity about that. But we had that kind of problem. These were agents of influence, I assume. There were a lot of things you could do. If you believe that the Dari Pashtu Service had an influence in Afghanistan then it would make some since I suppose, and it would be pretty cheap, to infiltrate a sympathizer with the intelligence service into one of those Services to find out what exactly who is doing what to whom and maybe have some effect on it. I think that was primarily the reason that they did it.

At Marti we had a definite problem with it. We had a Marti employee who also defected...that is, redefected. He was actually a DGI agent and showed up and held a news conference in Cuba wherein he made a lot of accusations against Radio Marti, etc. So the intrigue level was rather high, actually.

Q: You started in 1986 in the Voice of America. We were still pretty much Cold War at that time. By the time you left the Soviet Union had broken up. How did, from your perspective, this cataclysmic event play in dealing with the Voice of America?

CARLSON: First, I consider myself enormously fortunate to have been at the Voice during probably its most interesting time, if not one of its most interesting times, and to have watched the changes that took place from the time I arrived because our concentration was on the Soviet Union in many ways. We had an enormous audience there. When I came to the Voice we were being jammed by Soviet transmitters in large cities on a daily basis and it took an awful lot of resources, money and effort, to get those signals in successfully to these cities. All cities over about 750,000 population were ringed with jamming transmitters. In its height, say in 1988, the Soviet Union was employing about 10,000 people on a full time basis as jammers. It was costing them a fortunate as well, and of course they had a faltering economy as we now know, and Chernobyl took a bite out of that.

Q: Chernobyl being a nuclear accident.

CARLSON: That actually was a net loss of power to the Soviet Union of about 4 percent. They already had this exhaustive waste of power to run these transmitters. Jammers are simply transmitters and are set on a frequency, or change frequency as appropriate, and broadcast an interfering sound of some kind. Sometimes it sounds like somebody pounding on a pipe, or of pigeons being strangled to death, or something. They simply overlay the sound over our incoming frequency.

We spent all this money and effort to change our transmitter...the ways that we skipped signals in shortwave up to the ionosphere and we would bounce them down at an angle. It was actually very sophisticated. We had instituted a world command center in Washington from which we could control the Curtain antennas at sites around the world. In Wolferton, England, or in Munich, or in Halkis, Greece, or in Rhodes, or in Tangier, Liberia, the Philippines, etc. We could move these things and send the signals in different ways. We would send 12, 15 signals in Russian at the same time into major cities and then move them in an effort to avoid the jamming. And we would do that every day. We got pretty good at it. Mrs. Bonner, Lena Bonner came to the US.

Q: She was the wife of Sakharov.

CARLSON: Sakharov was in Gorky in exile. Mrs. Bonner was allowed to come to the US for surgery and got a lot of publicity. She called the Voice of America's Director's Office from the Watergate Hotel and I talked to her on the telephone. She said, "As you know I am here in Washington. I am not allowed to come over to you. I would like to come to the Voice and visit you because of what you are doing, but I can't because I promised the KGB that I wouldn't do anything that would cause any trouble. But could you come and visit me?"

So I went to visit her in the Watergate Hotel and she told me a story that is probably typical of dissidents. They sat in a park in Gorky every day with a portable radio and listened through the jamming transmissions to VOA news in Russian. What they wanted was news about the world support for dissidents and about other dissidents in the Soviet Union. She said that they would listen through repeated news broadcasts and she would have pen and pencil and her husband would speak out loud because the jammers interfered with every sentence practically. It would take them three or four hours to put together ten minutes of news. This enormous investment in time from these people. She said that then they would know that there were people like them and they were fed by this.

The importance of this was beyond the ken of the average American by a factor of ten. There is no way that people who sit swimming in soap operas and information could realize how in a modern age people as vital as Sakharov and his wife were absolutely cut off from any relevant information that could assist their lives.

We spent a lot of time trying to devise anti-jamming methods. In fact we did at one point come up with a pretty simple way which we actually spent a lot of money on with consultants to figure out how to get around the jamming by simply using a rubber band, some string and a piece of cardboard and a paper clip. Then we broadcast this over jammed frequencies into the Soviet Union. And it actually worked.

Q: You mentioned the dissidents. Were you targeting people like the dissidents? Were you trying to destabilize?

CARLSON: We were not. Experience had demonstrated that it was not the way...the law governs these radios in such a way that they are not supposed to be operated for that purpose. I assure you they were not, at least during the time I was there and certainly not the few years that preceded me. I don't know about the years before.

Q: I think 1956 scared everybody.

CARLSON: Yes. You were doing a disservice to the people. Actually one of the great fears, I think, was that we would sometimes run the risk of suppressing information that should have been delivered to people if you looked at it in a neutral way, for fear that it would instigate something. We fought against that, the inclination of it. I think it was a natural one to say that we had better not do this because it is too provoking, even though in fact it is true. When I was there the policy view was that if it was true, as long as we could triangulate it with sources, then it would be just responsibly presented. These people are bereft of information and our reason for being is to deliver it to them.

Q: Would somebody come and say, "This item came and we know it is true." Would there be deliberations on this at your level?

CARLSON: No, not usually. You couldn't run the place that way. The level were...the appropriate people, the program director, the news chief, and the Service chiefs would get together if appropriate. Sometimes it would be kicked up to us, but not normally. We would meet regularly and discuss all the different anecdotal problems and things, but of course it was up to them. These were sophisticated people.

Q: What about the dissidents in the Soviet Union? These were very important, a small group of courageous people who were also being courted by the media. These were the people the news correspondents sought out. What was our policy towards the dissidents as opposed to the plain Russian citizen?

CARLSON: They tended to be lionized by the Western press. I am not suggesting that they didn't deserve accolades in the slightest. But I think there was probably more of a realistic view presented of how dissidents fit into Soviet society from the Voice of America's Soviet Services because they were franker than most Western correspondents. Most of the Western correspondents in the Soviet Union didn't speak Russian, or Ukrainian, or any of the other languages. So on the face it was infinitely more difficult for them to communicate and assimilate with the normal Soviet citizenry and subsequently because of travel inability to have as realistic a view, I think, as the Voice did.

The Voice...we read every Soviet publication, we watch Soviet television. The Soviet Service was enmeshed, its professional life was devoted to understanding Soviet society. And of course they had a big leg up because in many instances they came from the Soviet Union or were the products of people who did because they were sons and daughters of emerges, or they were culturally connected with it. One was a professor of Russian at the University of Vermont, another had been a physician in the Soviet Union. We had a general who was a defector, General Bonin.

Q: A very dominant man.

CARLSON: Yes. So we had this mix of intellect. I am not saying they were smarter than your average Washington Post correspondent, but they certainly were well qualified to understand, if you can winnow out the prejudices. There was a counter productivity to this being equipped so well, I suppose. It came from the roots of their own ethnicity and their own emotions over what had happened to their grandparents, or...and they tended to be monarchists or anti-Semites. The most amazing mixture of human beings.

Setting all that problem aside, they really had a clearer picture of the Soviet Union...many of them had never been there at that time, although some had lived there. But they had a better handle on it than the UPI or AP correspondent, I assure you. Consequently, I think, could place the dissidents in the context of Soviet society where they could be understood better.

Of course, it was our job at the Voice to deliver news information and some cultural programs as well to Soviet citizenry without being surrogate...that is to report on local news, which was done was Radio Liberty. We did do some of that simply by virtue of discussing dissidents. We acted in the Soviet Union as more of a surrogate than we did in many other places. Worldwide English and French to Africa has infinitely less of a surrogate nature to it. There wasn't the need for it.

Q: In 1986 you were spending your time trying to get through. Then the Soviet Union began to crumble. How did you respond? What happened?

CARLSON: We made overtures. On a regular basis I would write to one person or another in the nomenclature in the Soviet Union trying to establish a Voice Bureau in Moscow. The rationale that I would offer to them was that it was in their interest to let us do this. We were reporting on events in the Soviet Union and doing it from afar. Though we thought we were doing a very good job, and we had a handle on truth filtered through human frailty, we nonetheless would do a better job if we were there. In many instances that might serve their purpose. People tend to be at a distance and don't understand quite as well as they can close up. You let the New York Times in but the citizenry never hear what they say. They are listening to us anyway and whether you like it or not we have 30 million people listen to us in the Soviet Union on a daily basis.

I would write to the Ministry of Information and they would change it. USIA had an information talk of some kind. Mr. Fallon from the Ministry of Information came. A fellow who became very powerful for a while with Gorbachev attended. They came to the United States and met with USIA officers on various exchange subjects...cultural exchanges, book exchanges, etc.

I went after them in a pleasant way pushing to come to the Soviet Union and let us open up a Moscow Bureau. They ultimately did do that. It was an indicator of thaw, I guess, and the fact that their empire was kind of crumbling, or had a lot of cracks in it anyway.

We kept hearing rumors that the Soviets were going to drop their jamming. They had started in December 1979 again with the invasion of Afghanistan and had continued since then. Previous to that there had been periods of jamming, it kind of ebbed and flowed as relationships changed. That same jamming was taking place in Eastern Europe as well, mostly controlled by Soviet military jammers and vehicles. So we heard rumors that it was going to fall away and various reasons were offered. Chernobyl was one of them. That is the lost of power and the drain on the economy from all of these transmitters. And coupled with the desire to look less repressive to the West.

And, of course, it did cease. I have forgotten exactly when. It allowed us to take money that was being spent on fuel, costs to run extra transmission time to bring in extra signals, overtime, etc. We were able to take millions of dollars and move it elsewhere. So this had a lot of ramifications for us. We didn't need to send in 15 signals anymore, we could do with three. It was really quite a change.

Q: At your level were you changing the aspect of what you were reporting? Were you getting more into sort of Soviet domestic...?

CARLSON: Well, I think we had been doing that for a long time. Radio Liberty, I feel, did a very good job as a surrogate broadcaster. Some of our audience was Radio Liberty's audience as well. There was a considerable overlap of audiences. I think that if you went through and took the Soviet Division during the years when it was jamming, then after the jamming fell off, you would detect a fairly subtle move away from delivering as much surrogate product as we had done and going back to more typically Voice of America delivery which had to do with international news and news of the United States and the West, which, of course, was of interest to Soviets.

And it is not to be dismissed easily either, as putting pressure on the Soviet Union in an indirect way by reminding, offering up as a reminder what life was like in the West. Although in fact one could never read VOA scripts and think that they glorified the West or that they offered in a gloating way how much better off we were economically. They were never calculated to do that. It is not a productive way of communicating with people at all. It makes them mad or gets them upset. They know that life is wonderful in the West in comparison and they would tell you that and don't need to be reminded of it all the time.

Many of our listeners were much more serious than the average American. I mean, it is the difference between shooting a gun and throwing the bullets, frankly. It is amazing. I am a little embarrassed sometimes at how unserious the average American is. Our average listener is very serious and intellectually stimulated. Maybe this is a product of the kind of repressive lives they led where they did a lot of internal...

Q: Also, you look at Eastern Europe, and I have served there. People will sit around the coffee table and talk, really talk about things. Not necessarily just politics.

CARLSON: It is ideas they talk about. It is like a college dormitory.

Q: And it goes on and on late into the night and again, again and again. You don't get that here.

CARLSON: No you don't. If you do I don't know where it is. I don't see it and I don't think it exists much. Here we live in a city with a lot of people who are smart, educated and involved in things and you go to a dinner party and what do you see? The intensity of Eastern European and Soviet citizens that I have encountered were entirely different.

Q: I think it is part of the system but also goes back to earlier times.

CARLSON: Well, they are the ones who listen to the Voice and are very serious minded. They could stay up all night talking about these things.

Q: Did you find as the Soviet Union was falling apart towards the end of your time, that Congress was saying, "Okay, what are you doing?" Were you beginning to thrash around looking for a role or not?

CARLSON: No, we were not. Of course you had what I feel were superficial thinkers who immediately...they read a headline in the paper and think there is a new direction here...so after 50 years of service they want to throw it out the window without having given much thought to the fact that there...one can articulate a lot of reasons for this to stay in place exactly as it is. If for no other reason the uncertainty of what you think the situation is in the Soviet Union...that things are not decided, that the Voice, if you believe America needs a voice abroad...I think most legislators do...then you won't throw this out quickly. But immediately we heard peace dividends, etc., now that it is over do you want to keep a bureaucracy for its own sake, etc.

In fact, is it over? No. What about Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, North Korea, Cuba. There are plenty of places in the world where people by the tens of millions are dependent on us for information. This is pretty cheap. It is about a penny a person a year. You can't just throw it out summarily. There was talk of it but I never took it very seriously because I didn't think that the House Foreign Affairs Committee or the Senate Foreign Relations Committee would take it very seriously either. And I don't think they would even now. That isn't to say that there shouldn't be a redivisioning of roles between RFE/RL and the Voice. The RFE/RL I think should be wound down. I think everybody things its role should be changed. I don't know that it should be eliminated in toto immediately. There are reasons in some of the Eastern European countries where the local media is so undependable, unreliable and the political situation is so iffy that having a surrogate radio for some years to come, maybe a small number, would be economically justified.

The Voice, itself, is entirely different. Putting those languages in place is very difficult. Once you have done it, if you get rid of them you can't do it again...it would take a year or more. We had that experience with Haiti. We put together the Creole Service after Baby Doc was ousted. We put it together rather rapidly, but it was difficult. We put together the Tibetan Service at the insistence of Congress. They actually legislated it. Finding Tibetan broadcasters who could be vetted from a security perspective, who spoke Tibetan in an attractive enough fashion to be appealing to listeners, who were cultured and educated in Tibetan, who understood the country to which they were broadcasting, is very hard. Where are you going to find them? You can't find them on a street corner. It was like Albania. We had to send teams to Albania every year looking for people who had swum across to Corfu or something to escape because we couldn't find Albanian broadcasters. You can't put your average American on the radio station here in Washington because they can't read very well or don't speak intelligently, or something. The same applies to Albanians.

Q: Turning to another area of the world. What about the Middle East? You always had problems with Israel and its neighbors, and the Iran/Iraq war, and the beginning of the Gulf crisis. First, Israel. This is always a major problem in the American political context because you have a very solid, very potent Israeli lobby, which is not all Jewish...it is also fundamentalist and all that. It snaps its fingers and Congress jumps. Yet to report this accurately...this is a time of essentially low level but a potent Palestinian uprising called Intifada and the Israelis were doing nasty things from time to time. How did you deal with that?

CARLSON: Again I would say that we applied normal American journalist standards to news gathering, writing and dissemination, etc. But we had problems on a constant basis. In the Arabic Service we had a number of people who were Palestinian Americans. I am not suggesting that they were a problem politically, but their presence was a problem politically because it caused certain pressures to come on us, to land on us, over the fact that we had Palestinian accented Arab voices. Where the pressures originated, I don't know factually, so I would hate to say. There was always a lot of speculation about these things...that they had something to do with the Israeli government.

Q: The Israeli disinformation service is certainly within the field of foreign affairs.

CARLSON: Yes it is. We came under considerable pressure. I can give you an example. During the Gulf crisis, we had some problems with Arab partners, allies, complaining to the State Department or through the US ambassadors in a couple of countries, about Voice coverage. The thrust of the complaints were that the Arabic Service is broadcasting, if not seditious material, it is close to it, in its sympathy for Saddam Hussein. This came to us fairly directly. A cable went from one country ambassador to the Secretary of State quoting the president of the country that the ambassador was accredited to. I was notified immediately by a high ranking administration person from the National Security Council who called me on the secure telephone and read it to me.

It was very problematic for us because here the country is swept up in this Gulf war and here is an allegation in effect that says that the Voice's Arabic Service was supporting the enemy. It wasn't quite that strong but running close to it. We immediately did a number of things. The Arabic Service chief and the person who controlled the division, very responsible people and both of Arab descent, but long time government employees and US citizens and people with whom I worked with regularly, and I had a meeting. We sat down and went over copy and matched up the English translations with copy into the Arabic language, trying to determine what they could be talking about. They were unspecific, as always. If these offhand remarks come out of the right lips they cause an enormous amount of trouble.

Secondly, I was approached by a US Congressman. The Congressman told me that he had just come back from the Middle East and was in Saudi Arabia. He had a comment made to him by General Schwarzkopf, the hero of this whole thing...

Q: He was the leader of the Allies Forces and American Army General who were fighting the Iraqis who invaded Kuwait.

CARLSON: He made a remark to this US Congressman or had a remark made by one of his men in front of the Congressman, I don't remember which, saying something like, "What is going on with the Voice of America, Congressman? I understand they are broadcasting pro-Saddam sympathies."

Well that was all I needed because I could suddenly see the story in the Washington Post that while we are all pulling on behalf of the war effort, the Voice is wandering out being seditious. It was such a good story that the facts be damned. And that is what happens sometimes in the news media. Rule number 6 in my lexicon of news rules is that if the story is really good that it is probably bullshit. And, in fact, this story was bullshit, but it was very good and the kind of story that would have made the light of day if I wasn't careful.

So, what we did was to immediately find enough money hidden away in various places to hire CSIS, as well as the Hudson Institute...

Q: CSIS stands for?

CARLSON: The Center for Strategic International Studies. It was headed by David Abshire, who was a former ambassador to NATO.

...to do a totally independent study quick, within a week hopefully, of Voice of America Arabic Service. They hired the Drs. Hunters...Robert Hunter and Sharine [phonetic] who speak Arabic. They brought them into the Voice and we gave them access immediately to any materials in the Arabic Service they wanted to choose at random. They took tapes, printed materials so that they could take a look at what was used to prepare broadcasting and they would listen to the broadcast. We ran Reuters, UPI, AP, etc., Washington Post synopses on those days that they arbitrarily chose themselves to match them up to see how fair and objective the coverage actually was and was there any substance to the accusation that it was pro-Iraqi. We did the same thing with the Hudson Institute out of Indianapolis. They supplied us with an Arab sophisticated academic. They both did their reports within a week their findings were delivered to us.

They were that the Voice of America was all of the things that I asked them to find out...it was balanced, it was fair, it wasn't pro-Saddam. What they had done, however, and I was aware of this, the Arabic Service had offered a balanced picture...balanced from a sense of general fairness...as to what was going on in the Middle East. It wasn't critical of the US government. If it opted for anything, it probably did what most Western media did, looked at it from the perspective of the West and didn't look at it from the perspective of the East. That is appropriate in my opinion. It wasn't so fair that it treated with more sympathy Saddam Hussein than George Bush. It didn't do that. It treated it pretty much as the New York Times and you felt their coverage was pretty fair. It was like that. It wasn't seditious at all.

At the very same time that I did this, there was circulating in Washington a package of documents, including a classified cable, that had gone from the US ambassador to one of the Arab countries, which quoted the president of that country, and had gone to the Secretary of State. CNN had it. Jack Anderson's office had it. And the Washington Times had it. They all approached us. They had these classified documents that in effect said, "What the hell is going on with the Voice of America?" Somebody was trying to sink the Voice of America in this. I know pretty much who it was, but I am not going to say.

Q: Could you maybe give a little feel for the motivation?

CARLSON: Yes. I think there were a lot of forces at play having to do with the target of opportunity, having to do with the good timing that now is the chance to get rid of some of these Palestinians in this Arabic Service. The Arabic Service had enemies in government quarters outside the United States and I think they just saw a good chance to get rid of them. Now was the time. Somebody at USIA leaked those documents in conjunction to one of these organized anti-Palestinian efforts. I think that was definitely what it was. We were just sort of in the way. If the Voice got damaged by this, well that was just too back, it didn't have anything to do with them. It wasn't personal.

We, however, were actually able to contain it. It never made the light of day. It took a lot of managerial skill to keep that from happening. There were two people at USIA that leaked the documents and there was an internal investigation. I demanded one immediately. I went to the security chief of USIA and told him that I had been contacted by CNN, my deputy had been interviewed by CNN and they actually had the classified document. There is nothing you can do about that. You can't go after the news media over a classified document, but you can go after somebody in an organization who leaks them. That is for sure. Only a few people had access to it. The security chief, Brian Dowling, and his people interviewed under oath various USIA employees. It was clear that two of them were involved in this and had leaked it to some organization that in turn was pro-Israeli and saw an opportunity to screw what they saw was a Palestinian Service, but which was really our Arabic Service, by getting the information into the media. But actually we talked them out of it because it was baloney. I fortunately had the study that we prepared in rapid order to demonstrate that what the problem was with the president of this country...some advisor had said to him I guess, "Gee. I just heard the Voice of America in Arabic and they quoted Saddam Hussein." Well that is right. We are in the news business. The New York Times quotes him too. But the Arab idea of being on your side is you broadcast "rip out their tongues at the roots" and "let's get rid of their eyeballs." You give no quarter. That is their idea of broadcasting, to ram it down someone's throat. They don't like Western journalistic standards. The newspapers in Saudi Arabia are different than ours as are the broadcasts. They are in the pocket of the government, the government gives them cars, etc. They didn't understand what we were doing and though they had been listening to us for years and when it comes time of crisis they expect us to be on their side. They have a vision of the Voice of America than its reality.

So somebody tells General Schwarzkopf this and he doesn't know anything about it. He kind of wonders why we are broadcasting stuff from the Iraqis for, why aren't they on our side. Well, we are on the side of democracy here. But sometimes it is a hard sell. I could tell that this was going to get away from me and that we were going to go down the tubes if we weren't careful and this ever made the front page of the Washington Post. But we kept it from happening.

Q: A great story. What about Vietnam? Did Vietnam sort of disappear off our radar after 1975?

CARLSON: Yes, it did in a way. I don't know immediately afterwards, but the Vietnamese Service of the Voice supplies information in Vietnamese to the people who live there. But we never had a lot of concentration on it. It is on the air a reasonably short period of time every day. Foreign policy focuses change and an Agency like the Voice or USIA can't have equally distributed impact in its focus, so, of course, it doesn't. We end up focusing on those parts of the world, at least from a managerial interest point of view, that were more au courant, and Vietnam was not.

Q: From a practical view of looking at it, here is a really dynamic country which is going through a bad spell now...I was consul general in Saigon at one time.

CARLSON: What year were you there?

Q: 1969-70. Here is a place that is going to be important later on.

CARLSON: Yes, it is.

Q: We have a lot of knowledge of Vietnam in the United States given our ten year involvement there. Were there people saying, "Come on now let's invest in the future. Let's really work on Vietnam because it is eventually going to come back in." Or was it just out of sight and out of mind?

CARLSON: No, it wouldn't be fair to say it is out of sight and out of mind. I never spent much time with the Vietnamese Service, though a lot of these Services run by themselves and there is no reason why I would. There was no call for me to offer them any...whatever I would offer to them in terms of direction. But just because I wasn't involved with it doesn't denigrate their importance. They just weren't within my focus often. But the Vietnamese Service, the Cambodian Service, and Laotian Service were very important because they had no other sources of information from outside in their native language. Vietnam might have, I am not sure, but the Laotians didn't and I don't believe the Cambodians had either.

Q: Did the French have any sort of effort being a former colony?

CARLSON: Yeah, a little bit. But if they have one in that part of the world, I am not aware of it. They certainly were not a major element in the area. So we had a responsibility we believed to maintain some intellectual life line, but it did not get the attention that the Soviet Service was getting.

Q: Turning to Radio Marti. Was that sort of dumped on your plate?

CARLSON: Yes, it was mandated by Congress. It was underway when I had arrived. I believe it started in 1985. It went on the air in 1986 before I arrived. Actually over a period of time the Radio Marti critics pretty much fell away, except on the very hard left. There were no moderate Congressional critics left after a year or so. It was quite successful. There were many critics before it got going as you may recall. It was very controversial. It became much less so.

It was a difficult Service to administer because of the nature of Cuban emigre politics. Its physical and intellectual headquarters were in Washington to try and remove it geographically from Miami and some of the problems there. It actually was a very reliable source of news for Cubans. It did not engage in politics. It was pretty much a constant struggle to make sure it didn't fall into a political mode, but it didn't. It was very well listened to. It experienced low level jamming by the Cuban authorities in Havana only. Otherwise its signal footprint covered the island. The polling that we did was difficult and consequently kind of unreliable, but it demonstrated a very high listenership. Probably in excess of 75 or 80 percent of the adults listened at least once a week to Radio Marti.

It had a number of shows that were successful. It had a soap opera, "Esmeralda" which was wildly popular. We would get anecdotal evidence from the Embassy about when "Esmeralda" was on, traffic would stop in downtown Havana, people would have their doors listening to it on car radios, etc. It was totally non-political show, as was much of what we broadcast. They are interested in baseball so we broadcast some baseball.

The news was what pulled the wagon. It was Cuban oriented, Spanish delivered. It was fair but focused to the extent it was possible on Cuba. Not as a total surrogate, but in many ways as a surrogate. On the war in Angola, for instance, the average Cuban at the time...I started there in 1986, the war was full on in Angola. The Cuban commitment for a decade or so had been 30,000-40,000 troops a year. That is an enormous number of troops for a small island of men between the ages of 17-30. That is a lot of people over a decade. Yet the average Cuban knew only about the war in Angola from word of mouth. The Cuban press didn't give an accurate picture of it. The enormity of the commitment was unknown to the average person. They only knew that they had family, relatives or friends in Angola. If men died in Angola, which they did due to disease, accident and gun fire, they were buried in Angola. They were treated in East Germany and sometimes they died there. The bodies were not returned to Cuba. It was very difficult for the Catholics in that regard. There were a lot of ramifications of that war, including AIDS.

Q: We are talking about Acquired Immune Deficiency Systems.

CARLSON: It was brought back by Cuban soldiers from prostitutes where the heterosexual problems of AIDS in Africa was very real. There was no AIDS screening. No recognition of AIDS whatsoever in Cuba in 1987 or 1988 after it had been acknowledged in the US. In fact, the only thing that was ever said about AIDS in Cuba in the Cuba media was that it was a Western problem, a decadent, homosexual problems. That was it. The only Cuban who ever had AIDS...I remember this in 1987...was a translator at the UN who had fallen into this degenerate life style in New York. That is how he got AIDS. Otherwise it was our problem. But in fact it was their problem and they knew it and the government was being thoroughly dishonest about it.

All of which is to say that Radio Marti performed a service on behalf of the Cuban people. It told them without being schoolmarmish about it, it told them about the AIDS problem. It didn't beat up on the Cuban government over its lack of honesty and candid. But it informed the people of things they never would get out of their own radio, TV or newspapers. It had an effect too. The Cuban government was taking AIDS people and locking them up in a former military officer's club. They would take them even in the middle of the night. They would put green garbage bags over them when they took them away, fearing they would get AIDS. Nobody knew that except for word-to-word gossip. We would broadcast stories about where they were being kept, the name of the army barracks and how many there were.

Radio Marti was big on research, just like Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. As a surrogate it was dependent on research and accuracy. There is no better way to lose an audience then to run a radio station in New York for listeners in Toronto and you get the names wrong, and don't understand that the mayor died last week, etc. Radio Marti was very good in that regard. It was made up of people who understood Cuba, of course. Radio Marti written reports are very scholarly and they put out a quarterly report on Cuba that covers every aspect of life in Cuba down to the tiniest detail. They did polling of traveling Cubans in Venezuela, Spain, etc.

They had a show called "Family Bridge," which was a call in show in Spanish. You would call in and say, "I want to send a message. This is Jose, I am a cab driver in New York City. My mother still lives in Oriente province in a little town of so-and-so and I would like to say hi to her and tell her everything is great. She has a new grandchild, etc." Since these Cubans all know each other or they know somebody who knows somebody, it is amazing and was a heartwarming show that was loved by people in Cuba because of the connection between American Cuban and Cubans still in the country. It was a very successful broadcast. We broadcast it both on AM and FM. We also bounced it so that it went to Angola. Though we were arguably forbidden from broadcast Radio Marti to other parts of the world because the legislation said it was designed for Cuba, we set it up in such a way that we made a hop with a shortwave and that hop happened to land right in Angola so that Cuban soldiers could listen to it. We understand the Cuban soldiers were forbidden to listen to it by their commanding officers.

Q: Today is April 7, 1993 and this is a continuing interview with Ambassador Richard W. Carlson. We are to 1991 and your appointment to the Seychelles. You were Director of the Voice of America and how did you make this switch?

CARLSON: I was appointed Ambassador to the Seychelles in the summer of 1991, at the end of July. I actually went over at the end of August, 1991 and came back a year later. I left the Seychelles around the middle of July, 1992 and went on to India for two weeks and then finished my official tour as Ambassador at the end of July. So it was a year in length.

The reason that I was offered the appointment to the Seychelles...and it was a political appointment as I was a political appointment at the Voice of America...was because of a long running dispute that I, and really others within USIA and the Voice of America, had with the sitting USIA Director, Bruce Gelb. It culminated in an unfortunate public fight in the spring of 1991. It resulted in Bruce Gelb being fired by the administration and being sent abroad to Belgium as the political ambassador. He refused to leave, by every account I have heard, unless I was removed from the Voice. I actually out lasted him...he left months before I did...but I agreed to take an appointment in the Seychelles to satisfy this particular fellow.

Q: Could you describe a little bit...Here you had George Bush who had been an ambassador, who was very conversant with foreign affairs. It was his great strength. Yet one of his appointments was a gentleman who was controversial.

CARLSON: Bruce Gelb was appointed as Director of USIA at the beginning of the administration in 1989. I think an objective panel would say that Bruce Gelb by every standard was a colossal failure as USIA Director. He was a person of considerable inadequacy. His history was that his brother, Richard Gelb, had been chairman of Bristol Myers. Richard Gelb is by every account a very able and powerful executive. Bruce Gelb apparently had been in his shadow all of his life and without playing psychiatrist here there were some serious emotional problems that came to just about everybody's attention at USIA. They manifested themselves in sort of an erratic, aggressive behavior and characterized by very poor judgment.

The difficulty that I and really every senior officer in the Voice of America had with Bruce Gelb had to do with Bruce Gelb's overwhelming desire to control the news at the Voice. He would regularly foray into the news department and attempt to make decisions about what would be covered, or how it would be covered, or how it would be disseminated. This is by tradition and by law an improper role for the USIA Director. It is one of the reasons that the Voice of America's Director is appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. Every attempt was made on my part and the part of other senior officers to politely and diplomatically stave off these attempts by Bruce Gelb to generally politicize the news.

All of his efforts to control the news were politically motivated. Sometimes his motivation were unfathomable at times. But they had to do with him demanding that we do a feature on air conditioning in Saudi Arabia because some friend of his from prep school wrote him a letter, which he showed to all of us at a meeting at the Voice of America, about the need for air conditioning for comfortable living in Saudi Arabia. We pointed out that the problem with this is that our Arabic audience in the main didn't have air conditioning. It might be useful for a Westerner but I didn't know personally...

Q: Our air conditioner kicked out when I was in Dhahran during the summer one time and I can assure you that for a Westerner it is very nice, particularly if you have small children.

CARLSON: But this is a fellow who wanted to consume the intellectual attention of the Arabic Service and the Voice programming people on doing something to satisfy some friend of his.

It also manifested itself in more serious ways. For example, when Fang Lizhi, a very well-known Chinese dissident, was released from the American Embassy where he had taken refuge in Beijing...he was released by agreement by the Chinese government, whisked from the People's Republic of China, and brought to the West. It was a highly publicized event. Fang Lizhi had taken refuge in the Embassy on the heals of the Tiananmen Square uprising and was well-known to the Chinese and the West as a very strong critic of the Chinese hierarchy. He was in the Embassy for a long time, possibly a year. He came to the West. Bruce Gelb approached me one day and said, "I have been reading that Fang Lizhi is in Canada. He is coming down to Washington soon to speak before Congress." "Yes," I said. He said, "Do you intend to interview him and broadcast it in Chinese to China?" I said that I didn't know but assumed that we would interview him and broadcast it to China. If we were unable to interview him we probably would have broadcast his public statement, etc. to China. Gelb said, "Well, I would rather you didn't do that, it would be hurtful to the US interests I feel because I have some reason to believe that the US has made an agreement with the Chinese not to publicize or embarrass the Chinese with Fang Lizhi's presence in the West." I said, "Well, I don't know anything about that. But I am not about to interpose myself between the Chinese Service and Fang Lizhi. The Chinese Service which has done this incredible work before, during and after the Tiananmen Square crisis..."

Q: They were sort of your elite of your Voice of America.

CARLSON: Yes. ...and they had been depended upon by tens of millions of Chinese listeners for honest information. The Chinese are going to be interested in what Fang Lizhi had to say and I imagine we are going to cover it." So he said, "Well, I don't care what the New York Times does about Fang Lizhi. I don't care what the Wall Street Journal does. I care what the Voice of America does because that is what the Chinese are going to hear." So I said, "Well, Bruce, I am afraid I am not going to do this."So he and I get into a wrangle over it, to the point where he pursued me. I went on vacation in Maine and he called me there on a public line. I kept saying that he should be very careful what he was saying. This is a man who is bereft of any common sense. He went on about the reasons why the administration didn't want this done. But I don't believe he was speaking for the administration. I know for a fact that he didn't have the confidence of anybody on the National Security Council. He was speaking for Bruce Gelb and Bruce's interpretation of how he could assist the administration.

I explained to him that for us to interfere with Fang Lizhi and prevent an interview with him reaching the Chinese would be immoral under the circumstances and would be politically very dangerous. General Scowcroft and Larry Eagleburger had already been criticized in the American press for traveling to Beijing and being photographed lifting a cocktail high to the Chinese leadership. I happen to believe that that was demagoguery on the part of the US press because it is impossible to meet with the Chinese leadership without toasting them and they didn't explain that fact. They made it seem as if Scowcroft and Eagleburger were making merry with the Chinese after they had smashed the lives of these students. Well, it was not quite as simple as that. Anyway, it made the administration look bad. I pointed out to Bruce that if this made the administration look bad can you imagine what it would do to the President if anybody ever learned that high administration officials, like yourself, prevented the Chinese people from being told what Fang Lizhi was doing in the West. It would be outrageous. I communicated this to others, including General Scowcroft...

Q: Who was the National Security Advisor.

CARLSON: Yes. Nobody was on Bruce Gelb's side that I am aware of, but it put us at great odds. If the Director of VOA went around determining who was going to be interviewed when there are 49 language services and hundreds of events and 1200 hours of broadcasting live every week, it would be quite a thing, wouldn't it. So our policy there, which is the right policy, is that the Voice of America Director is there for among other things to protect the integrity of the broadcasting. But it is hardly his job to be making program decisions on a finite basis and it certainly isn't the job of the USIA Director.

It got so miserable between us at the Voice and him. Though it focused on me, I don't believe it was personalized at all. But it became very tough and ultimately I told Bruce Gelb to stay out of my building. He told me that I was fired, and I told him that I wasn't. I would have to be fired by the President or someone who had the ear of the President. If any responsible White House official told me that I was fired, then I would leave quietly. I told the White House that, too. Bruce Gelb certainly wasn't going to be the person to fire me. I told him in effect to take a flying jump. He did tell me to my face that I was fired and told everybody else that I was fired. But I wasn't. He couldn't do that.

So it was a very uncomfortable year in this position. I hate to say...this sounds like I am crowing, but Sheila Tate, the Chairman of the Board of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, told me and others the other night at a dinner that one of the reasons they were interested in me here was that they felt that I had stood up successfully to...actually in my opinion I stood up to a guy who wasn't very hard to stand up to because he was a weak willed person... Anyway they thought that was great. It appealed to the Corporation. That is the basic story.

Q: Was anybody trying to handle Gelb in the White House?

CARLSON: Yes, they were. I think the clash between Gelb and I...getting into the simple way of describing it, the way the press described it...that it said very positive and very negative things about the system of political appointments. On the one hand, I feel that political appointees might be like Bruce Gelb, that they were inept and not qualified to be doing what they were doing. That is the down side of the political appointment system. Bruce Gelb was not a friend of the President. He was known to the President, but his brother was a very close friend of the President and had been a classmate at Yale. His brother by every account was trying to find a position for Bruce in government. Bruce was interested in public affairs. He had no broadcasting experience. He basically was the guy who for 30 years in corporate America bought the art. That was his level of responsibility at Bristol Myers. He was able because he was a well-to-do fellow and because his brother was powerful and because he looks good on paper, to get a position for which he was not really qualified.

On the other hand, I conducted myself in the right way. I did things that I believe a career person couldn't have done. I was able to stand up to Bruce Gelb, not because I am so wonderful, but because I knew I was only here for a limited period of time. If I had a career to worry about I could never have done that. Nobody could. They would have had to put up with this. I saw people at USIA whom I knew very well...the Counselor of USIA, for instance, the senior most Foreign Service Officer, and others...who felt the same way about Bruce Gelb as I did and who went home at night and sat in the dark on their porches with a glass of bourbon trying to recover from the day's activity with a fellow who was clearly in the wrong place.

Yet they couldn't do anything about it. Whereas I could say to Bruce Gelb, "You are not firing me. Go ahead if you think you are so tough, but I am staying right here." But they couldn't do that.

So I do think in a way that it did point up how useful a political appointee can be and how appalling a political appointee can be.

Q: I think this has always been the ying and the yang of the political appointments. One of the strengths is that a political appointment very often can have the ear of the President or someone, where the career person doesn't have that type of access. So often power can be used.

CARLSON: And Bruce Gelb tried to hurt some of my senior staff who were career people and loyal to me, I felt, in a proper way, but not blindly loyal to me. They were loyal to their duty, I believe, and because of that he tried to hurt them. He attempted to hurt my chief of editorials, who was due to be promoted. Gelb wouldn't sign the promotion because he thought by every account that this fellow was loyal to me. He wasn't. He was loyal to the institution, to his job, to the mission of the Voice. It was a terrible thing that Bruce Gelb did.

He was probably one of the worse appointments of the Bush administration. I know for a fact that the Bush administration tried to get rid of him. They tried to get rid of him the year before this happened. There was a meeting at the White House, I have talked to participants at the meeting, where in they tried to move Bruce Gelb to another position as a US ambassador. The US ambassador that he was to replace, flew into the country and met with John Sununu and at one point the President and said that if you appoint Bruce Gelb to this position you will damage relations that we have with this country. These relations are important. The ambassador who said this was due to be transferred in a three way rotation motivated solely by trying to get Bruce Gelb out of Washington. This ambassador who said this, I know him personally, would have gone to a more important post in a larger country, but he didn't do it simply because his duty required him to tell the President that this fellow was a dangerous executive. They didn't make the change because of that. It affected this ambassador's career. He never got the post he was going to get. It involved some very well known people and that was a year before Bruce Gelb got fired. They didn't know what to do with him.

This is not a weakness of the Bush administration as much as it is a weakness of that kind of political system. You know, I know, and people in the press know that this is not uncommon to send somebody over as ambassador to Ireland after they have failed as head of HHS. We know an example. Margaret Heckler. That is exactly what happened to Margaret Heckler. She got canned and everybody knew it in the Reagan administration. I don't know if it was ever printed.

Q: Oh, it was printed.

CARLSON: Okay. She was inept at HHS. I know someone whom she offended wildly, who was a friend of the President's and went to the President over it. She was rewarded with being sent to Ireland. The same thing happened to Bruce Gelb. But actually they tried the year before and he wouldn't leave. He dug his heels in. He is a whinny, cry baby kind of guy. His brother supported him. Sometimes it is easier for political people to say that they don't want any part of it and they walk away from it until his behavior becomes so egregious that something has to be done.

Bruce Gelb was finally called by John Sununu into his office. He was called in on a rouse, actually. It was late on a Friday afternoon and Bruce Gelb thought he was going to meet with the communications director of the White House. When he arrived he was taken right into Sununu office where they tried to fire him. He refused to leave. Sununu who was up to his eyeballs in a million problems at the time thought it was going to be a 15 minute meeting. It dragged on to about an hour. Bruce Gelb sat down and dug his heels in and called his brother on the phone and absolutely refused to leave. It was a monstrous problem for everybody. When they said to me that he would leave if I promised to leave my job...I know this is hard to believe...

Q: This sounds like kindergarten.

CARLSON: Oh, totally. And they were all sympathetic to me. They all said at the White House, "I know this is embarrassing, this is horrible and you have done a wonderful job. We are not holding anything against you." I said, "Look, I know when I embarrass the President. I wouldn't have this job if I weren't appointed to it. I don't own it." So I ultimately agreed to take the post in the Seychelles. Bruce actually left before I did, which killed him apparently. I'm sorry this is a long story...

Q: Oh, no. This is what we are trying to catch. This is real life. It may sound like kindergarten, but this goes on. We are trying to catch the effect of personalities on not just policy but the system and everything else.

CARLSON: Well, I am so glad that I went to the Seychelles. I went to this little tiny group of islands, these 112 paradisiacal islands in the southwest Indian Ocean. My first response when I was told this...I had come from what I thought was an important job and was kind of stunned when they said to go to the Seychelles. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized that here is a wonderful opportunity for me. It was interesting and different and beats a number of other countries they could have sent me too in Africa. As it was I had a wonderful time.

I thought it was politically interesting and it is like being sent into Warwick, Rhode Island. You are brought in as the representative of a considerable power and you are attached to the city council and you are given access to information that tells you everything you want to know about every member of that city council. How they behave, what they have done in the past, what the political intrigues are that surround their lives. You are not only made privy to all of the things that go on in the body politic of the city council and its effects on the population of Warwick, Rhode Island, but you get to play a role in it as well on the highest level. It is so small that you can understand it in reasonably short order. In my case I was only there for a year. If it had been a large country, I would have been still learning. But since the population of the Seychelles is about 70,000 people and because the number of people who make up the decision makers and opinion leaders is small, you meet them all in a fairly short period of time. Then you learn one level of truth and then a second level of truth and then the real truth maybe, as to what is really going on. But you can do that in a small place like the Seychelles.

Because the American Ambassador there is as important as the president of the country in many ways...certainly treated that way by those around the president...that is kind of appealing. I don't mean that simply from being saluted or referred to as Your Excellency, but because you end up being privy to information that you wouldn't get if they didn't think you were so important and feel that they have to give it to you. I just loved it from the day I arrived.

Q: Could you give a little idea how you prepared to be an ambassador and talk a bit about what kind of briefing you had about American interests, etc.?

CARLSON: I did think when I arrived in the Seychelles and had been there for a short time how lucky I was that I had been involved in government as a political appointee. I knew how to write cables, and had had some experience with the Foreign Service. My deputy was a Foreign Service Officer. Because of the Voice and its interests I was in regular communication with posts abroad and had an understanding of the acronyms and the language used. If I hadn't had that I think I would have been somewhat at a lost. In fact, I can't imagine being just dropped into a country as ambassador with no experience at all in simply how to conduct a dialogue. Because of the Voice I had been on a number of diplomatic missions to China and to the Soviet Union. I had led talks of one kind or another. I had some experience with protocols...a lot of it is common sense, but it made you more comfortable. Consequently I didn't feel really uncomfortable meeting with the Foreign Minister on a regular basis and engaging in conversations.

I also felt given all of that background the preparation that I received was pretty good. My relations with the State Department had been good when I was at the Voice. As their treatment of me as a new ambassador, it was just excellent. I was in a class of about a dozen or more new ambassadors. They ranged from the Seychelles to good size countries. There were political appointees and career ambassadors. There was one ambassador who had had three post already but who felt that it was useful for him to go through the couple of weeks training session again. It was, I thought because I had been around this a little bit, that it was easily understood. I learned a lot of new things and felt very comfortable. I was pleased by the fact that every ambassador was treated equitably. It didn't make any difference...since there is considerable responsibility difference between my little country and a post in a big country...but there was a concerted effort on the part of State to treat everyone exactly the same. I felt pretty prepared when I went over. A lot of that, as I say, was attributable to the prior 6 years at the Voice.

I had very specific briefings on the Seychelles as well. It is small enough that it is not complicated to understand or explain. I had briefings from various appropriate government agencies and felt I had a handle on US foreign policy interests there, which were very limited. They have to do with the fact that they have one vote in the United Nations. The Seychelles are spread over about 400,000 square kilometers of southwest Indian Ocean. They are close to the sea lanes that go to the Gulf and involve oil shipping. So there is an interest in the place because of its geographical location. Actually in the southwest Indian Ocean, the British, the Indians and the French all historically had interest there and there is considerable subtle jockeying for position in the area. And the US wants to make sure it maintains a seat at that table. There is a US government tracking station in the Seychelles which is of primary interest to the ambassador.

Q: The tracking station is what?

CARLSON: It is a highly classified US government tracking station which is run by the Air Force in conjunction with other government agencies. There are four Air Force personnel and about a 120 American citizens who are employed there, and probably another 100 Seychellois who are employed there. It has been there since the early '60s. It is used to position US satellites. It is five degrees above the equator and apparently in an excellent geographical spot to control satellites in that part of the world, and it does. It actually is run out of Sunnyville, California and then in turn out of Space Command in Colorado. The US is very interested in protecting it because they consider it quite vital to US defense. And it was important in the Gulf War. The ambassador has no role in the running of the station and neither does the commander, for that matter. It is really basically run out of the United States, but there are technical things that have to be done there. But the US ambassador's role is to protect the station. There have been no threats against the station, but they are always concerned that the government of the Seychelles be reminded that the presence of that station is important to the US.

The government there has been a consistently left wing government since the present president overthrew the democratically elected president in 1972. President France Albert Rene is the former Foreign Minister and has been President for all these years-21 years. He was a great friend of Julius Nyerere's in Tanzania. Nyerere was sort of his mentor and assisted him in the overthrow of the sitting President, whose name was James Mancham. Mancham is still alive and while I was ambassador returned to the Seychelles after an absence of 20 some years. When France Albert Rene took over there had only been one year of democracy. The country had previously been a British possession from 1814 until 1971. Prior to that it was a French colony. French influence, culturally, remains to this day. The people speak French, also Creole and English. Prior to 1971 there was no airport and the mail plane came from Mombasa, a thousand miles away once a week, landed in the bay, and that was it. It was a place that was extremely remote, incredibly beautiful.

Its touch with the West was mostly through British civil servants who would retire from India because you could live on $25 a month there in the '30s and forties. It has a racially harmonious population and a pretty good standard of living. No grinding poverty, no malaria, white sand beaches and azure water.

When France Albert Rene took over he became very friendly with Cuba, the Eastern Bloc, the Soviet Union, etc. The US for many years had a concern that the Seychelles would give a deep water port to the Soviet Union and might allow one of the islands to be used as a launching pad for long range bombers. So it has been a center of intrigue. And it is a place of enormous intrigue for some reason. Maybe having to do with island living, I don't know. It is known as the islands of spies. Part of that is press mythology and "60 Minutes" did a piece on it called "Island of Spies" about three years ago. If you listen to them you would think that everybody is spying on everybody else, but it wasn't quite that way. But there is, for whatever reason, this constant gossiping and talking. It is quite a remarkable place.

It has the mix that any isolated island might be expected to have of kind of interesting characters. The President's security forces is run by a former Congo mercenary named Bob Nodine. A very interesting fellow who was in the French Foreign Legion and made quite a name for himself when he worked for Mobutu as head of security. He now runs a 3,000 armed force in a country of 70,000 people. I knew Bob Nodine quite well. He is a terribly interesting person there is no doubt about it. He denies that he is the security chief. He actually pretends that he runs a little restaurant called La Serend on the beach. He sort of admits privately that he runs the security force, and he does.

He was a friend and cohort of Mike Hoare the famous Congo Belgian mercenary who invaded the Seychelles in 1982 and tried to over throw it. Bob Nodine was the head of security at the same time it happened. You may remember there was a shootup that happened at the airport, quite by accident, and Mike Hoare commandeered an Air India flight to escape from the islands and did, after negotiating with his old friend Nodine. They are cut from the same bolt of camouflage cloth, there is no two ways about it. Then Julius Nyerere sent in a bomber about three hours too late and bombed the airport after everybody left and did practically irreparable damage to the runway.

It is an amazing place. The doctors are Bulgarians, the teachers are from Great Britain, etc. The reason being is that what passes as the hard left in the islands came from President Rene over years the middle class left or was driven out, about 12,000 of them. They happened to be the two doctors, the six lawyers, etc. so there was no middle class to run the country. So they had to bring them in from abroad. So they brought them in from the Eastern Bloc and from China, etc.

It is a place with the embassies are very large. The Soviet embassy at one point had 28 Soviet staff. This is a little tiny country. That is a very, very big embassy. They actually had 12 intelligence officers at one time. They were targeting the US tracking station in part ...targeting employees at the station. I think it was the kind of intelligence efforts to turn country nationals into long range workers for your intelligence effort. Its probably a way for the Soviets to get a hold of a Chinese and use him in the future when he is posted somewhere else. The place was so little that you can't avoid contact with other people, but if you wanted to be isolated and have that contact alone, it is very easy as well...just get in a boat and go around the corner. So without question there is a lot of that going on there. That made it a little more interesting too.

This was the kind of place where the US Embassy...you are not going to believe this, but the US Embassy is in a building along with the British High Commissioner's office. In that building we had a floor. It was right downtown across from the Pirates Arms, which is the headquarters for all of the intrigue on the islands. The US Embassy is on one floor. The British High Commissioner is on the floor below. On the main floor is a fairly well known fugitive British private detective who is wanted in the murder of one of the chief dissidents to the President, who was shot to death in London a couple of years ago. He has been wanted by Scotland Yard. I would see him every day. So would the British High Commissioner.

The building it turns out...I was irritated by the rent we were paying which was in the neighborhood of about $900,000 per year and I thought it was a little high. We paid it to an offshore company. We undertook to figure out exactly where this money was going. It turned out that our building was owned by the Gokol brothers who were prime movers in BCCI.

Q: BCCI is Abu Dhabi bank which is right now and has been for the last ten years involved in money kiting schemes...a very disreputable outfit.

CARLSON: Yes. Their office was in our building as well. They just closed about the time I got there. I actually let the State Department know about this because if nothing else this was a possible Jack Anderson column that we were paying $900,000 a year to BCCI owned building. It was actually owned by the Shell Corporations, one in Amsterdam and one in St. Lucia or something. But it was owned by the Gokols who were Pakistanis. I had never heard of them but they were quite famous. They owned a shipping companies and about a third of BCCI and quite mysterious guys. That was typical of the way things operated in the Seychelles.

Q: The fact that you were the American Ambassador there in a place where everybody was spying on everybody else they must have wondered why you were there and who you were?

CARLSON: I think this is basically true. The State Department was quite supportive of the idea of my pushing President Rene towards a multi-party democracy. The timing was perfect in the fall of 1992. All the changes that were taking place in Africa were of great interest to the Seychelles government. Their friends in the Eastern bloc had all fallen. The Soviet Union was in disarray. The former USSR ambassador had become the Russian ambassador. When I got there he was totally confused. I got to know him quite well. He was a protï¿½gï¿½ of Shevardnadze's, the Foreign Minister.

Q: He left to become the President of Georgia at the present time.

CARLSON: Yes, and the ambassador, whose name was Kilselov, had followed a very aggressive intelligence officer named Orlov who had been disliked and who had run a very aggressive, anti-US campaign. He did all kinds of provocative things behind the scenes to screw up relationship between the US and the Seychelles. Kilselov was a professional diplomat and this was his first ambassadorship. He had the rug pulled out from under him. He couldn't even get a return cable. There was no foreign policy. I used to go fishing with him a lot.

The State Department very much liked the idea of our pushing, in a little place like this, for a free press which they didn't have. They had no opposition press at all. It wasn't allowed. There was a law that prevented anyone from criticizing the President. Now the President, this is a London School of Economics graduate who used to speak kind of First Amendment talk until he got to be the President, then it all went out the window.

So when I went over I stopped in Great Britain and met with the State Department counterparts at White Hall and then had a meeting with people from the Quai d'Orsay on the subject. The French, British and Americans, and ultimately the Germans...there is no German ambassador accredited to the Seychelles is resident in Nairobi...formed a combined effort to push the President and the administration of the Seychelles into a liberalized press policy and a multi-party election. And we succeeded.

Q: These are easy terms, "we pushed," what do you mean?

CARLSON: I took the lead in this, but the British High Commissioner and the French Ambassador were very important to this...we all had conversations about it and some of it was probably reported to the President given the security apparatus of the Seychellois government and the fact that we had meetings at unsecured places. We took a fairly aggressive verbal position in representing our respective governments, that the time had arrived where the President must seriously consider the events in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and Africa and the changes that were taking place and accommodate himself to those changes. And that the US government which supplies aid to...well it rents the tracking station and there is always an interest in increasing the rent of the tracking station and always an interest on the part of the US government to keep the rent down. There were AID funds in a limited fashion and really quite small funds considering. There is a high standard of living in the Seychelles much which is contributable to foreign aid, although they don't like to say that. It's a $5000 per capita income there. So $20,000 for a family of four is quite a high standard of living. Most of that is out of foreign aid; some from tourism, but most from foreign aid.

The President was sensitive to this and in a series of sessions with him about the political realities of life and the resolve of the US government not to tell people how to run their own government, not to tell them what form of government they ought to have within a....

[side 2 of tape 3]

....there was no interest in the part of the US government in telling the President of Seychelles what form the government of the Seychelles should take in a finite way. That is not our role. But the idea that the people of the Seychelles ought to play a role in how the government is determined was something we strongly believe in. So do the British, and so do the French. It was the first time that this kind of pressure had been brought to bare in a concerted way where four strong countries were telling the President in effect that now was the time to do this.

Q: With the Soviet Union no longer in existence and all, this pretty well stopped any sort of counter offers.

CARLSON: Yes, that is right. We were appealing to the President's pragmatism, if nothing else. The President said he was a very strong socialist, but like most people he was really interested in power, and like most people in power he was interested in the perpetuation of the power. This is what I believe. It was probably more attractive to him to talk about doing good through power because you can get away with a lot if you do that. If you talk socialism you can somehow skip over a few human rights violations here and there if they are not too egregious. Human rights violations were serious in my opinion. Of course, judged against actions in Africa they were nothing. Realistically people were not being strung up by their armpits on hooks. There were people killed in the Seychelles. Some were killed because of the government. But there were a small handful of them. That doesn't excuse it in the slightest, but there was no wholesale terror. But there was oppression of people.

Q: Well, a 3000 body guard...

CARLSON: That was terrible. Let me amend that. There were 3000 under arms. Part of them were militia. Nobody is allowed even to have a spear gun. Any weapon is outlawed. So the army and the navy were about 1800 and then there were another 1000 party members who were armed and had uniforms and were trained. They weren't full time military.

The President was mostly interested...I think his socialism was more of a public relations device. He would have been more interested in the welfare of the people if he had truly believed in it. He was much more interested in personal power.

We approved him in September, October, November and on December 5 he held a news conference announcing freedom of the press in the country. He didn't say that certain diplomats had been bugging him so he was going to do this. He, in fact, made it seem like this was something he had had under independent consideration for some time. In point of fact, the previous July he had stated in his July 6, a big holiday there, speech that he had no intention of going to a multi-party system, that one party was all that was required and that that was perfect for the Seychelles. They didn't need a conflicting newspaper. All it did was to cause chaos. The government controlled press was perfectly satisfactory.

There had always been an underground paper, but if you were caught with it you ran the risk of going to prison. I think the President was finally smart enough to realize that the underground paper savaged the President regularly. In the most unbelievable ways. They would print lists of his girlfriends and their addresses, and when he was there, etc.

As soon as the President allowed an opposition press, the opposition papers became immediately very responsible. They stopped doing that to the President. They realized their responsibilities. In effect he got a better...they became much less...everybody read the "Black Tortoise," which was the name of the underground paper, because it was so scandalous. But as soon as they got legitimatized they became like the New York Times of the Seychelles.

They have had a constitutional convention, the President was nominated...this was after I left. They still have had not total electoral freedom, but they have moved a long way from where they were last fall.

Q: How did you find the American Embassy and your staff?

CARLSON: I thought it was very good. It was very small. We had 21 people all together including about 7 Americans. The DCM, Steve Malott, is still there. He is a Foreign Service Officer with probably about ten years of experience. He is an admin officer. He was very good I thought. He was in his late '40s. He had wide academic experience which was useful. He had been a dean of a number of schools...Dean for Administration at the University of Alaska, at Georgetown in a senior position. He was a very smart guy and very capable. He and I got along awful well.One of the things that was useful to me was that I had had a lot of experience working with the Foreign Service and I think that helped. He also had, I found out later from him, awaited making judgments about me. He immediately called people who I knew or didn't know but people who knew me, at the Voice to get a subjective rundown. That is what everybody always does. He did that and told me later that he was much relieved to find out that I was a reasonable person. He had, what I have come to believe is a perfectly realistic fear, that he would be getting someone God knows what he would be like.

Q: Like Bruce Gelb.

CARLSON: Exactly. He told me that he was relieved to learn that I had a reasonable reputation. I would not be breathing down the senior officers' necks. My management style at the Voice was what I always described as an ensemble management; that I was an ultimate arbitrator of things but on the other hand I wasn't interested in telling the senior officers how to do their jobs. I shouldn't have to do that and I wasn't going to do that. I wasn't going to go around second guessing them or leaping in and getting upset with them if they made a mistake. I would treat them with respect until they proved to me that they didn't deserve it and I wouldn't expect that to happen. I went into this anticipating good results. I just assumed they were superior people and that was why they rose to a superior position. When I held meetings they shouldn't feel obligated to say anything. If they didn't have anything they felt worth saying, don't say anything.

I was very interested in very good clear communications in writing in my work environment and expected it at the Embassy. I knew how to write cables, which was helpful, and I had been a reporter. So I was interested in politics in a sentence. I had the ability to write cables to Washington without sending too many. I was very interested in having a good relationship with the Desk, and I did. I thought the best way to have a good relationship was don't communicate with them too much, and I didn't. I made a point of sending what I thought were well written, not too colorful but just colorful enough, reporting cables, but not too many of them. Otherwise I figures they would stay out of my hair and I would stay out of theirs and I could do my job, which in the Seychelles probably requires about four or five hours a day of concerted effort. I could do it pretty well by myself with their guidance and counsel occasionally. And I think it made them happy. They don't want to hear from somebody all the time. It is unnecessary. So I thought I had a good relationship with them.

Q: Were you sort of downsizing the Embassy? With the Cold War over, I am sure if the Soviet had 12 KGB people, we had to cover them.

CARLSON: Half of them were GRU. They had six and six at one time.

Q: Were we knocking down our influence?

CARLSON: Yes, considerably. They had wound a lot of that stuff down. They still had a very sophisticated KGB officer there, actually, Boris, I used to see him all the time. He actually had quite a reputation in the KGB at one time as a big time operator. I think he was there because it was a pleasant place to be more than anything else. That area of interest had considerably declined on the part of the United States.

Q: What about tourism. Did you have problems with Americans getting into trouble?

CARLSON: Nope. That was the other thing we didn't have in the Seychelles. I hadn't had any other ambassadorial experience and I probably never will have any other, but I didn't have the consular problems that I think are very common in big posts. I didn't have any Americans coming through, that's why. The Americans who lived there were almost all natives in effect. Some had been there for 20 years, so they weren't a problem...very occasionally. I didn't have lost passports, or people dying, or anything like that. I didn't have any special delegations. I had not one CODEL while I was there.

So my obligations from a representational point view, I felt, were put on maybe one lunch, maybe one breakfast, maybe two dinners during the week. Meeting with local government representatives or people from local industry, etc. That was it. That was my obligation.

The Ambassador has a boat in the Seychelles and a captain, to get between the islands, there are a lot of islands. So you are free to use that boat for that purpose. That is terribly appealing, actually, because the weather is always nice and the water is always clear and blue. If you want to throw a fishing line over the side when going from one island to another, that is okay too. I actually caught six sailfish while I was there. And you can use the boat to take out other diplomats, which I did.

The Russian Ambassador was so bereft of information and I was probably his prime source of information above board about the Soviet Union. I would give him information from the Wireless File, from the New York Times, the Washington Post, whatever, on the Soviet Union. He would read it to the Embassy. The KGB chief told me that. I used to get these mailings from Brookings, from the Heritage Foundation, on sovietology. I would send them over to the Russian Ambassador. He would read them, photocopy and distribute them because they didn't know what was going on. It was terribly interesting to them, I guess.

It was a great post. Of course it was an island and out in nowhere. It isn't a place you would want to stay three or four years in my opinion.

Q: You left when?

CARLSON: I left in July, 1992.

Q: Did you get an offer you couldn't refuse?

CARLSON: Yes. What happened was, I was approached by the Corporation of Public Broadcast. They were interested in me but didn't offer me the job. They asked if I were interested. I contacted State and talked to Hank Cohen...

Q: Who was the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of African Affairs.

CARLSON: Right. I told him and notified him of it. I also talked to the White House because I liked my job and also because they had sent me over there. I was appointed to it and it might not be the Court of St. James's but I thought it was interesting and felt I had an obligation to remain. But on the other hand I didn't want to pass up this job. If it was acceptable I would take it.

Anyway, I was offered the Corporation of Public Broadcasting job and Constance Horner, who is the chief of personnel at the White House went to President Bush and told him that I had been offered this job. The reason she did that was because there had been this imbroglio over Bruce Gelb. So the President was very supportive of my taking the job and personally said so to me in a letter.

I don't think they really cared in the State Department...I don't want to kid myself, somebody else could do the job as well as I could. But I would have stayed out of a sense of duty otherwise. But I was offered the job and I accepted it.

I left one year later in July and stopped in India for about ten days and then came home. I was officially retired from the State Department on July 31. Then I became the President of CPB immediately thereafter, within a week.

Q: You might just explain briefly what CPB is.

CARLSON: The Corporation of Public Broadcasting is a private company that is funded, in the main, by US tax dollars. It was begun 25 years ago and its mission is to foster and develop public broadcasting in America. Its budget over a 3 year cycle is about $1,110,000,000. It funds 350 television stations and about almost 500 radio stations to some extent. On the average it supplies about 17 percent of the funding of those stations. It also creates through seed money a television series for children, a dramatic series, in the individual specials.

Through its programming department we will typically assess a couple of hundred proposals a week, but we will supply $200,000 to $400,000 for the creation of a documentary usually in concert with other entities...WETA, WGBH in Boston, or some large producing public station, as well as corporate underwriters. We will share responsibility in a show like the "Civil War." We put up money for the "Civil War."

Q: A very famous series on the civil war.

CARLSON: The Corporation acts as a bully pulpit for public broadcasting. It attempts to supply the kinds of shows that are more narrowly focused than commercial broadcasters. They don't necessarily have a broad public audience, although they often have a substantial audience, but they don't have to go after the lowest common denominator in an attempt to sell sufficient advertising.

Q: Okay. I want to thank you very much.

CARLSON: Mr. Kennedy, thank you so much for taking so much time with me.

Q: I appreciate it.

End of interview